

The Meaning and Practice of Dialogue:
An Ethico-Onto-Epistemological Re-Reading and Exploration of Bakhtinian Dialogue

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My dissertation was both inspired by and written in a time of intensifying polarization. I began conceptualizing my project shortly after the contentious 2016 US presidential election and have engaged in teaching, data collection, analysis, and writing against the backdrop of ongoing tensions and flare ups in the culture wars, which the Trump administration seems to have exacerbated, sometimes deliberately. Throughout the process of conducting this research and writing this dissertation, the news has been dominated by controversies, including those related to the #MeToo movement, the Masterpiece Cakeshop trial, the national anthem protests launched by Colin Kaepernick, the zero tolerance/family separation immigration policy, the nominations of Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, and repeated instances of police violence against Black Americans, and the Black Lives Matter movement. As my social networks responded to these controversies, I have been inundated with vitriol and indignation from all sides of the political spectrum. As someone who is often rather conflict-avoidant and politically moderate, this has been uncomfortable on many levels, and I originally turned to dialogue as an ethical ideal that I felt was inherently non-polarizing. Writing in my qualifying paper that “I see polarization as a failure of dialogue,” I believed that if people would learn to be in dialogue with the political Other, they would tend to be less polarizing in their interactions and, consequently, the country would become less polarized (and my news feed would be less uncomfortable).

As an educator, I was also interested in how schools might be implicated in polarization and how they might participate in its resolution. Inspired by Dewey's (1916/2009) argument that schools have a duty not simply to omit but to counteract that which is “perverse” in the everyday social environment, I imagined how educators might cultivate non-polarizing discourse in

classroom discussions and contribute to national depolarization. In this, I found myself aligned with the likes of McAvoy (2020), who recently posed the question, “Can schools combat partisan belligerency?” Although few other scholars have considered how schools might respond to present levels of polarization as explicitly as McAvoy (see also McAvoy & Hess, 2013), many, especially in the areas of civics education and social studies, view classroom dialogue as conducive to civic wellbeing and as an antidote to problematic patterns and discourses prevalent outside of school (e.g., Nash, Bradley, & Chickering, 2008; Parker, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2003; Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017).

While I have not entirely abandoned this perspective, as I continued to ponder the nature of both dialogue and polarization, I became less comfortable with the assumptions that polarization is necessarily bad, and that dialogue is/should be non-polarizing. I want to briefly explain this discomfort here, focusing primarily on the former assumption because I will, in subsequent chapters, extensively discuss my vision of the nature of dialogue. I think this conceptual clarification is important not simply per se but as a practical matter with pedagogical import; after all, education policy and practice is largely shaped by axiological assumptions about how the world ought to be (see Biesta, 2015). To begin, I simply note that unity, civility, moderation, and compromise—the virtues of non-polarization—are imperfect ideals. While these virtues have some value, there are moments when the proper response to certain injustices is full-throated, disruptive, and untempered opposition, moments when anything more moderate only enables and perpetuates evil. These moments are likely to be polarizing, and a polarized response may, in fact, be the most ethical kind. Of course, there are other moments when these polarizing attitudes and behaviors are improper and counterproductive; moments when seemingly righteous indignation is really self-righteous; moments when full-throated, disruptive, and untempered

opposition only ends up enabling and perpetuating evil. In short, there are moments that call for depolarization and its associated ideals.

To give two examples at the national level, we tend to think of both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War as equally justifiable and praiseworthy, even though they represent on one level opposite ideals—independence and union. We also celebrate Abraham Lincoln for both the polarizing stance on slavery he ultimately adopted and his depolarizing treatment of former Confederates after the Union victory. I invoke these examples here only to illustrate my point that polarization is not necessarily bad (though it can be) and depolarization is not necessarily good (though it can be). From our current historical standpoint, it is clear that certain forms of both polarization and depolarization will sometimes land you on “the wrong side of history.”

One reason for this is, simply put, history is not over yet, and the line between its good and bad sides is still being drawn, blurred, erased, and re-drawn. People and events once highly esteemed have fallen into disrepute and vice-versa, over various scales of time. Once an utterance is made, an act is performed, a life is lived, it enters into the great dialogue of the ages, vulnerable to reevaluation and reinterpretation from any number of different perspectives. While, from our current standpoint, Americans tend to think of both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War as beneficial and just, who knows how they will be judged in a thousand years? It is possible that future historians will conclude that the Civil War ultimately exacerbated and prolonged oppressive race relations more than it relieved them, just as the formation of America may eventually be considered more harmful than good.

Recognizing this humbling reality and that neither polarization nor depolarization is inherently good, we are left to discern, as best we can and with no guarantees, how to respond to a given situation which will, undoubtedly, represent a complicated meshwork of obligations to

various entities and ideals, some of which may be contradictory. In other words, we rarely, if ever, choose between unadulterated good and bad; rather, we feel our way through various degrees of good and bad, sensing that some options are better than the alternatives. We find ourselves pulled simultaneously toward polarization and depolarization, caught in the tension between these opposing ideals and others, and must gauge the relative weight of these obligations. Of course, this demands that we attend carefully to our ethical calculus, aware that we may give undue weight to certain obligations at the expense of others. When someone makes the wrong choice (if, indeed, such a determination could be definitively made), choosing polarization or depolarization when the other is called for, it is because they have mistakenly weighed their various obligations, not because one was inherently better than the other.

With this in mind, we must view our choices and, more specifically, our understandings of and reactions to polarization, as provisional and contingent. It is possible that the current state of polarization will yield a more just society; it is also possible that it will merely produce social unrest and dysfunction—or worse. Although this is cause for introspection and humility, it is not an excuse for inaction. We must weigh the multiple obligations we feel, determine what response is best (and why), and move forward, recognizing that we may be mistaken. And this is where I think dialogue is vitally important—not as the solution to polarization (or anything else determined a priori to be a problem), but as a dynamic relation with the (political) Other in which we open ourselves to the Other both addressively and responsively, offering our own unique perspective and receiving theirs. This may lead to less polarizing interactions, but it may not. Dialogue offers no guarantees beyond this: that the self-Other relationship has the potential to be enriching, to help us outgrow our current identities and perspectives, to become more fully

attuned to the diversity of voices that make up our world and, in the process, to find our own voice.

If educators began with the above understandings of polarization and dialogue (rather than assuming that polarization is bad and dialogue is non-polarizing), what kinds of discussions might they hope to see in their classrooms? What kind of discourse would schools seek to cultivate? These are the questions that frame the empirical and theoretical work I report on in the following chapters. To be clear, this dissertation is concerned with interpersonal relationships, specifically in the context of discussing polarizing political issues, and not with institutional polarization, though there is certainly some relation between the two. My goal is to explore and theorize the nature of dialogic relating with an eye toward cultivating dialogic relationships in schools. To do this, I facilitated three series of discussions with young people, the transcripts of which have become my primary data source. Analyzing these transcripts in light of the dialogic ethics I articulate in Chapter 2, I identify patterns in these groups' discourse and my own facilitation, evaluate them in terms of their dialogic potential, and consider how we might have more dialogic discussions in the future.

I believe that discussions about controversial issues provide a particularly poignant setting for considering the nature and cultivation of dialogue in part because they intensify some of the dynamics that are present in every self-Other interaction. It is always hard to respond to the Other in way that neither assimilates nor alienates, that acknowledges their alterity but does not exclude them from kinship, but it may be especially hard to do so in relation to certain polarizing issues. Studying and seeking dialogue in the context of controversial issues, thus, may provide particularly rich and illustrative data for understanding dialogue more generally.

But why study dialogue in the first place? Simply put, because it is fundamental to everything else. While we can certainly appeal to other ideals, including those mentioned above and others popular in the field of education such as “democracy,” it is important to recognize that these do not come to us extra-discursively, as if revealed in their ideal forms from the heavens. Rather, what such ideals mean in practice is an open question in an ongoing collective dialogue. For example, in the abstract, “social justice” is an unadulterated good, but once it is defined in human language and pursued in practice, it becomes utterly contestable. What anything actually means in the world is the result of dialogue and subject to ongoing dialogue. Recognizing that there are no extra-discursive, transparent, and objective ideals, at least none that are accessible to mortals, we are simply left with the reality of the Other and the questions of how we will respond to each other and who we will become together. As I have come to see it (and as I will explain more fully in the following chapter), the fundamental reality is that we exist in relation to other persons; everything else is a matter of dialogue, open to revision, deconstruction, and judgment. Given this understanding, I have sought to understand what it means to relate to the Other dialogically; rather than focusing on any predetermined outcome, I have tried to attend to the processes of responding well to the Other.

This approach has implications for educators not simply in terms of how they respond to their students, but how they see themselves in relation to their subject matter. As with the ideals discussed above, disciplinary content does not exist in a vacuum but is itself part and product of ongoing dialogues. All meaning, in fact, is dialogic; the nature of the world, at least as it is made meaningful to humans, is still under discussion, so to speak. This is the case at both macro and micro scales, from our collective scientific understanding of climate change, for example, to particular students’ sense of themselves in relation to their science class. From this perspective,

when educators work with a group of students, they are participating in the ongoing production of the world, understood as something that emerges in (rather than preexists) human meaning-making. In some ways, the stakes could not be higher. I want to better understand what it means to truly be in dialogue because, it seems to me, if educators can cultivate dialogic relations with their students and their subject matter, they will dialogically author a better world (though, of course, what that means is an open question).

There is, however, an irony here. Although I believe that dialogue is fundamental to human existence and meaning making, like everything else, what “dialogue” actually means is itself contestable. Recognizing this, what follows must be viewed as an utterance, as a response to extant conversations and an articulation of my perspective at this point in time/space. As far as utterances go, however, a dissertation is rather peculiar, so I want to provide an overview of the broad argument I make in the following chapters:

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Reviewing the body of education research that invokes dialogue as a pedagogical ideal, I argue that the field's notion of dialogue has largely derived from the arguably monologic discourse patterns and epistemic power relations that are typical of school, of which the IRE (initiation-response-evaluation) exchange is the quintessential example. While scholars have conceptualized dialogue as an alternative to these patterns, they have generally maintained the underlying assumptions of the field, in particular that classroom dialogue ought to be understood and evaluated in terms of its effect on how students learn disciplinary content. Responding to that general orientation of the field, I ask, What would happen if we re-thought dialogue with different assumptions? What might we notice by de-centering epistemology in education research?

To begin answering this question, I turn to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, a prominent theorist of dialogue in and beyond the field of education. Synthesizing Bakhtin's extensive work, I argue that Bakhtinian dialogism should be read as an ethico-onto-epistemology. Unfortunately, Bakhtin's ethical thought has been widely ignored, and the field has focused mostly on the epistemological and, more rarely, ontological aspects and implications of his work. To counter this tendency, I review Bakhtin's oeuvre, re-reading it in terms of ethico-onto-epistemology, with a particular focus on ethics. As part and product of that re-reading, I suggest that dialogue, understood as an ethical self/Other relation, has three dimensions, which I term answerability, responsiveness, and capacitation. These "dimensions of Dialogue" refer, respectively, to how we speak from our own unique perspective, respond to the Other, and render the Other capable of further and better responses in the ongoing dialogue.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I provide some context regarding the three series of discussions I facilitated and the young people who participated in them, and I explain my data collection and analytical approach. Overall, I suggest that my approach might best be described as "thinking with theory" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017), but empirically, it has much in common with teacher self-study (Tidwell, Heston, & Fitzgerald, 2009) and microethnographic discourse analysis (Bloome, Carter, Morton, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005). My analysis focuses primarily on the transcripts of each group's discussions about a variety of controversial issues, which I analyze in light of the Bakhtin-inspired framework developed in the previous chapter.

Chapter 4: Presencing Selves in Dialogue

Focusing not primarily on what students learn in dialogue (i.e., epistemology) but on their "relational becoming" (i.e., ethics and ontology), in this analytical chapter, I develop the idea of

“presencing,” a term that refers to how interlocutors become present to each other in dialogue. I suggest that processes of presencing can be understood in terms of “addressability” (i.e., how interlocutors render themselves addressable and how they address each other). Drawing on these lenses, I analyze moments of relational becoming in our discussion. In this analysis, I highlight a marked tendency toward abstractions in our discourse. This pattern is troubling in terms of relational becoming because, by rendering ourselves addressable and addressing each other in abstract terms, we fail to relate to each other as unique interlocutors (which is fundamental to Bakhtinian dialogue).

Chapter 5: Cultivating Dialogic Genres of Classroom Discussions

In this second analytical chapter, I trace how two concepts/practices with dialogic potential (i.e., “name-signing” and “looping for understanding”) were taken up in a group, focusing on how we experienced “friction” in our efforts to relate to each other dialogically and to change the ways we participated in discussions. Drawing broadly on Bakhtin’s insights about speech genres, I suggest that this friction can be understood as “genre interference” (i.e., differences in participants’ senses of the “kind of thing” we are doing together when discussing controversial issues). The moments of friction provide a glimpse of the various genres at work in a seemingly simple moment of discussion (e.g., one student may be operating in a genre of discussion-as-persuasion while another may be operating in a genre of discussion-as-truth-seeking). Understanding these genres helps explain why certain students took up (or didn’t take up) the potentially dialogic concepts/practices in certain ways, including in ways that arguably were not very dialogic.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

In this section, I bring together the concepts developed in the data chapters and consider how the groups' relational becoming coevolved with their "generic becoming," a term I use to discuss changes in genre. I then revisit several interactions analyzed in the data chapters and reimagine how, informed by the concepts introduced and developed in the previous chapters, I might have responded differently and more dialogically. In particular, I consider how the dimensions of dialogue might lead us to different discussion genres and how non-school genres such as ensemble improv and group therapy offer models for what classroom discussion could look like.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Overview of Dialogue in Education Research

In the field of education, dialogue has long been considered an ideal, harkening back at least to the days of Socrates. Indeed, the influence of Socrates' elenctic method is still evident in the popularity of pedagogical structures like Socratic seminars, though questions have been raised regarding how dialogic Socrates' method really was (see Lefstein, 2010; Matusov, 2009), not to mention any particular implementation of it. Over the past fifty years or so, however, educationalists have witnessed a dramatic resurgence of interest in dialogue and dialogic pedagogy as part of the "social turn," stemming largely from work in sociolinguistics (e.g., Halliday, 1978) and Soviet socioculturalism (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978) which encouraged educators and researchers to conceptualize learning as a function of social relationships, situated in particular sociocultural contexts, and worked out interactionally.

The focus of the social turn on the processes of teaching and learning underscored that how students are educated is just as important as what they are taught (Wells, 1999)—indeed, that they are, in many ways, co-constitutive. Building on this understanding, a multitude of studies have documented the rather monological tendencies in many classrooms, characterizing and problematizing the discourse patterns and epistemic power relations that tend to prevail among teachers and students in Anglo-American schools. This research has repeatedly found that teachers tend to talk more and be positioned as more knowledgeable than students (e.g., Alexander, 2006; Cazden, 1988); students not only speak relatively little, but rarely address each other (at least not in school-sanctioned ways) (e.g., Lefstein & Snell, 2011); and most of the teacher's prompts tend to be known-answer questions and the students' responses tend to be relatively succinct (e.g., Wells, 2007). As Erickson and Shultz (1996) describe it, "Much of

classroom life is a monologue followed by a test” (cited in Lyle, 2008, p. 227). This pattern occurs at various scales, from the ubiquitous IRE (initiation-response-evaluation) exchange that lasts a few seconds to a semester’s worth of lectures that culminate in a final exam. Although some scholars have complicated this conclusion, pointing out that seemingly monologic exchanges may not be entirely inappropriate (Burbules & Bruce, 2001; Kamberelis, 2001), most simply take for granted that the prevailing patterns are undesirable and can be understood as monologic.

Against this backdrop, dialogic instruction has come to be understood as an alternative to the status quo, and education researchers generally use the term to label interactions which manifest discourse patterns and epistemic power relations that are different from those that prevail in schools; when, for example, teachers ask open-ended, authentic questions; students initiate turn chains and respond to each other; teachers attend carefully to students’ ideas and take them up in subsequent discourse; and knowledge of the subject matter is co-constructed rather than transmitted (see Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes, 1999; Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2008; Nystrand, 1997; Wells & Mejia-Arauz, 2004)

While scholars have conceptualized dialogue in contrast to prevailing patterns in classroom practice, they have generally maintained the underlying assumptions of the field, generally taking for granted that school and classroom dialogue ought to be understood primarily in terms of what students learn. Indeed, for the majority of education researchers, the effectiveness of dialogic pedagogy in terms of student learning relative to other approaches is of particular concern. To quickly demonstrate the prevalence of this paradigm, I have collected a list of how various scholars articulate their primary interest in studying dialogue. Although they

use different terms, they reveal a shared focus on dialogue as a means of producing student learning. Consider the following scholars' interest in what they variously term:

- “the forms of educational dialogue that seem to be productive for learning” (Hennessy et al., 2016, p. 16),
- “the characteristics that verbal interaction in classrooms should display in order to optimize student outcomes” (Howe, Hennessy, Mercer, Vrikki, & Wheatley, 2019, p. 2),
- “a general pedagogical approach that capitalizes on the power of talk to further students' thinking, learning, and problem solving” (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019, p. 83),
- “academically productive classroom talk” (Michaels et al., 2008, p. 286),
- “the effectiveness of instructional discourse” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 7), and
- “the nature of student participation...that is most predictive of student learning” (Webb et al., 2019, p. 176).

As is evident in this list, across the field, the primary telos of classroom dialogue is understood to be fostering students' learning, and it is considered to be good because it works better than the more monological traditional approaches.

While some who accept this goal qualify it with regards to students' depth of understanding (Lyle, 2008), ownership of ideas (Nystrand, 1997), and even polyphony (Skidmore & Murakami, 2012, p. 208), they often seem to have in mind rather conventional curricular endpoints and pedagogical relationships. This paradigm is most evident in studies that explicitly examine the effectiveness of dialogic instruction rather than taking it for granted. For instance, Howe et al. (2019) analyze the relationship between certain kinds of verbal interactions and students' SAT scores and passing grades; Lyle (2008) argues that the Philosophy for Children curriculum, a model of dialogic instruction, improves students outcomes on a range of

assessments, citing a study that measured the impact of the curriculum on “norm-referenced tests of reading, reasoning, cognitive ability, and other curriculum-related abilities” (Trickey & Topping, 2004, p. 365); Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes (1999) consider how students’ “exploratory talk” affects their scores on a reasoning and problem-solving test, and Webb et al. (2019) presuppose that the teacher is an authoritative representative of disciplinary knowledge who ought to deliberately guide students’ sensemaking toward canonical understandings. Taken as a whole, this body of literature is primarily invested in cultivating students’ understanding of disciplinary content that already exists and which teachers can be assumed to correctly understand and represent as they respond to student thinking and facilitate classroom discussions. To the extent that classroom dialogue produces meaningful and lasting learning of that content, it is considered to be beneficial and desirable.

The Problem of a Technological View of Dialogue

This focus on dialogue as an effective means to produce learning is myopic at best. To see a moment of dialogue as nothing more than a means—a technique, a technology—is to ignore that dialogue is constituted in and by human relationships. Though a focus on learning is certainly understandable, eliding the human and relational context in which that learning occurs strikes me as ethically problematic. Indeed, it is misleading to refer to learning, as I have just done, as if it occurred in the abstract. Learning does not simply occur; people learn, and they do so in relation with each other. To ignore this reality as an educator or a researcher is to risk treating one’s students or research participants as merely a means to an end¹. After all, like learning, dialogue does not exist in the abstract and cannot be “used” in the same way one might

¹ In Kantian terms, this is a violation of the humanity formulation of the categorical imperative (see Johnson & Cureton, 2019).

use a text or software program; it is not an object, separate and distinct from the people using it. When wielded simply as a technology to produce learning, dialogue exploits one's interlocutor(s), appropriating their words and ideas, and using them as a means to an end. This is not to say that it is necessarily wrong to consider the pedagogical potential of dialogue, only that it entails an ethical risk of losing sight of the humanity of one's interlocutors. Unfortunately, it seems to me that in the field's pursuit of the most effective pedagogical techniques, and specifically with regards to dialogic pedagogy, many seem to forget that curricula and pedagogical techniques are not simply technological means to an end, but mediate and participate in human relationships.

In this light, it is rather troubling that the social turn in education research has predominantly led to questions about how to more effectively produce learning rather than to questions about the ethical quality of those relationships. If we distill the social turn down to the notion that learning is a function of social relationships, the general response across the field has been to take the telos of learning certain content for granted, assume that most pedagogical relationships are basically ethical, and proceed to consider how to shape those relationships so that they effectively produce learning. This is not the only path that could follow from the social turn and, in this dissertation, I explore an alternative, questioning some of these prevalent assumptions and seeking to theorize dialogue less myopically and, hopefully, more humanely. Specifically, I approach classroom dialogue in terms of what I will call "relational becoming," a term I use to invoke both ethics and ontology. By centering relational becoming rather than learning per se, I invite the field to remember that classroom dialogue, and education more broadly, takes place between people and that the qualities of their relationships are consequential in ways that transcend what the interlocutors learn.

An Alternative to the Technological View: Relational Becoming

Bakhtinian Dialogism as an Ethico-onto-epistemology

I turn to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to theorize dialogue in terms of relational becoming. I will argue that Bakhtinian dialogism should be considered an ethico-onto-epistemology even though it is generally read in education circles only in terms of epistemology and, more rarely, ontology. In this expansive re-reading of Bakhtin, I foreground his ethical thinking, which has been largely ignored. This focus should not, however, be understood to imply that ethical considerations are distinct from ontological or epistemological considerations; indeed, in a dialogic paradigm, ethics, ontology, and epistemology are inextricably interrelated. Before outlining Bakhtin's dialogic ethics, I want to briefly discuss these interrelations.

This discussion requires us to be willing to suspend some conventional ways of understanding our existence, perhaps most radically the belief that at a given moment the nature of the world is basically settled, and consider that, instead, the world is always in the process of being authored—that the world we inhabit is always in the process not of *being* but of *becoming*. One reason for this is because, as Holquist's (1986) puts it, “Human being is acted out in a *logosphere*” (p. 61), the space of meaning-making. Although reality exceeds human meaning-making, what is real *for us* has been made meaningful; we do not have access to an unmediated reality. From this perspective, the question of what exists (ontology) is always also a question of what that means and for whom (epistemology). The world we inhabit is a world that we author in dialogue with others. Consider, for example, what would happen if someone were to demonstrate with certainty the existence of God. The abstract fact alone that God exists is meaningless. God may exist, but what does that mean? What kind of being in God? Benevolent? What does that mean? The possible questions are unending, and in the abstract, no matter how many questions

are answered, the fact remains meaningless without understanding how we are implicated in those answers. I take this to be Bakhtin's (1993) point when he says, "To understand an object is to understand my ought in relation to it (the attitude or position I ought to take in relation to it)" (p. 18). To understand an object is not merely to perceive and cognize it, but to understand how one ought to respond to it. The meaning of God's existence is not self-contained and self-existent; it only becomes meaningful in relation to particular persons.

One of the things that Bakhtin (1984) appreciates about Dostoevsky is the way he grasped and illustrated this dialogic nature of human being: "For Dostoevsky there are no ideas, no thoughts, no positions which belong to no one, which exist 'in themselves'" (p. 31). Nothing in the logosphere is simply given; what something means is always an open question in an ongoing dialogue among particular persons. The meaningful world is unfinalized, always already in the process of being re-authored. As Bakhtin (1984) muses, "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (p. 166). Meaning—and, relatedly, accessible reality—in other words, is never entirely settled and stable, and knowledge is always partial and perspectival.

Up to this point, I have been referring to knowledge about *something*, the truth of objects. For Bakhtin, this kind of truth is secondary to the more fundamental truth of our relationality with other meaning-makers; our meaning-making, always already a response to them, presupposes their existence. This seems to be Bakhtin's (1984) point when he observes that Dostoevsky understands the world not as a "world of objects...but a world of consciousnesses mutually illuminating one another, a world of yoked-together semantic human orientations" (p. 97). This echoes his earlier assertion that "The truth of the event is not the truth that is self-

identical and self-equivalent in its content, but is the rightful and unique position of every participant—the truth of each participant’s actual, concrete ought” (1993, p. 46). In other words, the fundamental truth is simply that we exist in relation to each other, that we are bound together in dialogue. Everything else—all “ready-made truth” (1984, p. 110), all “truth-as-formula, truth as proposition” (*ibid*, p. 98)—becomes subject to revision, questioning, and re-authoring. In Morson's (2004) words, “Truth becomes dialogically tested and forever testable” (p. 319).

But this ideational truth that is forever testable is not the “truth” of primary importance. More fundamentally, Bakhtin (1984), inspired by Dostoevsky, seems to be after a kind of truth that is “not contemplated but followed” (p. 100); not the kind of truth that is “found inside the head of an individual person,” but that which is “born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (p. 110). The truth that is born between people is not ideational but relational; not a fact, concept, or proposition, but the process of being true to another person. In this light, it may be more helpful to consider truth in light of its verb form, to true, meaning to adjust to a proper alignment/form. This kind of “truth” is about how we respond to each other, about our “orientation toward the other's voice, the other's word” (*ibid*, p. 98); it is about *truing* our relationship with the Other so that we and they can respond better to each other and, in so doing, better co-author the world we co-inhabit.

Recognizing that propositional truth is never definitive, Bakhtin invites us to consider what it might mean to true our self/Other relationships—which, after all, are the dialogical context in which propositional truth becomes meaningful. This is important not simply because it may allow us to understand the world better, but because it affects the very nature of the world. This is because, as Dostoevsky insisted, “Reality in its entirety is not to be exhausted by what is immediately at hand, for an overwhelming part of this reality is contained in the form of a still

latent, unuttered future Word” (quoted in Bakhtin, 1984, p. 90). As we true our relationship with the Other, we can tap that potentiality and affect, perhaps even transform, meaningful reality. The nature of our relationships with each other (ethics), the world (ontology), and truth (epistemology) are inextricably interrelated.

Ethico-onto-epistemology in Everyday Terms

An analogy may be helpful: Imagine a group of balloon artists at a park. For the purposes of this analogy, I will compare the balloons these people hold to ideas. The first implication of this analogy is simply that ideas do not exist like free-floating balloons, waiting for people to discover them. There is always a person at the other end of an idea. If ideas are like balloons, they are balloon animals tied to a string, always shaped and held by certain people. Whenever we encounter an idea, we enter into relation with the person who articulated it in its current form, whether we recognize it or not.

Now let us imagine that we are walking through the section of the park where the balloon artists are gathered. There would be something strange and inappropriate about walking around with our heads tilted toward the sky, ignoring the balloon artists on the ground. Even if we had no interest in developing a friendship with them, and simply wanted to enjoy looking at their creations, we would want to at least acknowledge their presence and their hand in shaping the balloons. As in the analogy, when we discuss and develop ideas, we are not merely in the realm of epistemology, but in the realm of ethics. This is because ideas are authored by and in relation to other people, and those relations have an ethical quality—at any given moment, they are more or less optimal. (I will consider below the qualities that constitute optimal self-Other relations; for now, it is enough to recognize that relationality entails ethicality. Our response to the Other

can be ethical, unethical, or in between—and what exactly it is may never be entirely clear—but it cannot be non-ethical.)

One reason for this is because our responses “matter” in the sense that they affect the nature of the world we inhabit (St. Pierre, 2013); we are always in the process of becoming together. Whenever we respond to the Other, we participate in authoring them and the world we jointly inhabit, with concrete (though not necessarily noticeable) consequences for who we become both individually and collectively. From this perspective, each interaction with the Other opens up and/or closes certain possibilities of becoming, tapping latent potential or not, inviting or discouraging certain responses. And this places us not only in the realm of ethics, as if ethics were only about saying or doing things that people consider to be polite, sensible, and appropriate, but in the realm of ontology and the nature of meaningful reality.

Returning to our walk through the park, each comment we make and each interaction we have affects, however slightly, the balloon artists’ subsequent creations, processes of balloon tying, senses of self, relationships with each other, possibilities of collaboration, and visions of the future. Even ignoring the balloon artists would have this kind of effect; we cannot not respond to the Other, and what exactly it means to be in this world with these people changes with each response.

There may be reasons to occasionally decouple utterances from the people who articulated them, to consider the characteristics of an utterance relative to other utterances and not explicitly or exclusively as the creation of a certain person. However, to primarily understand and relate to the world on this plane is strange—something like imagining oneself as a balloon, floating above the park and dealing with the other balloons, not the people on the ground below.

Revisiting the Literature on Dialogue in Light of Relational Becoming

In this light, let us consider an excerpt from a recent publication that is reasonably representative of the broader literature on dialogue in education research:

During inquiry dialogue, participants interact with each other's ideas, adding detail to given reasons, qualifying general statements, or finding flaws in each other's arguments ...The multiplicity of perspectives generated in search of the most reasonable answer to the big question enables students to test their ideas against those of others, providing a self-correcting mechanism that helps improve the quality of argumentation. (Wilkinson et al., 2017, p. 67)

In this example, participants are portrayed almost entirely in the ideational plane, and “inquiry dialogue” is represented as the means by which they clarify and sharpen their understanding. There is little sense that participants are embodied individuals in felt relationships with each other, jointly authoring the world. Indeed, other students seem to be positioned primarily as “idea sharpeners,” useful for honing one's thinking. In this paradigm, ethics and ontology are entirely backgrounded to epistemology. This is made surprisingly explicit in the words “participants interact with each other's ideas,” as if the students were not simultaneously—and more fundamentally—interacting with each other. Wilkinson et al. (2017) surely want students to have an interesting discussion *and* to behave ethically, but they seem to assume that the students' search for the most reasonable answer to the big question will be sufficiently ethical as to not merit any comment. Ethics, in this paradigm, seems to be something to be nominally aware of so as to avoid or repair problematic interactions, should such arise—but certainly not the primary consideration. Operating in this paradigm, Wilkinson and colleagues largely ignore their participants' relational becoming and focus instead on the quality of their argumentation.

This episteme-centric approach is one way among others that we might take to understand and respond to moments like this, an approach that has long enjoyed a central place in the pedagogic imagination. This centering has come at a cost: Teaching has come to be understood as a technological process through which learning is produced more or less effectively, and not fundamentally as an encounter between people that, in a real sense, matters. Blinded by a rationalistic quest for efficiency, and we have lost touch with the emergent world and our particular place in it relative to unique others. In this dissertation I consider how we might be become more attuned to the human, relational, ethico-ontological qualities of classroom dialogue.

Bakhtinian Dialogism in Education Research

In order to underscore how my re-reading of Bakhtin in light of his early ethical thought can both to deepen the field's understanding of Bakhtinian dialogism and encourage alternative understandings of dialogue more broadly, I first provide a brief review how Bakhtin's dialogism has been taken up relative to classroom dialogue. In broad strokes, I argue that the majority of researchers who cite Bakhtin, reflecting the tendency in education research, emphasize the epistemological implications of his dialogic understanding of language and thought, while a small group of contrarians emphasize the ontological aspect of dialogue. I refer to this latter group as contrarians both because they are a minority and because they criticize the majoritarian focus on epistemology. Although both groups deal with ethics to some extent, they largely ignore the ethics inherent in Bakhtin's own ethico-onto-epistemological thinking.

The essence of these two groups' divergent readings of Bakhtin is captured in the following comments from Nystrand (1997), an episteme-centric majoritarian, and Wegerif, (2008), an ontology-minded contrarian. Enthusiastic about the possibilities of dialogic

instruction, Nystrand observes, “The work of early-twentieth-century Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin is useful for understanding how verbal interactions shape the understandings and thinking of the conversants” (pp. 7-8), noting shortly thereafter that, “What is special about Bakhtin and Volosinov is the way they derive an epistemology from a conception of social interaction, relating how people make sense of things to how they interact with each other” (p. 10). Somewhat annoyed at the majoritarian tendency to cite Bakhtin without grappling with the more radical implications of his theory, Wegerif responds, insisting that “Bakhtin goes beyond epistemology, or the issue of how we know things, into the realm of ontology, or the issue of the ultimate nature of things” (p. 349). The quotes I have chosen highlight explicit differences between these scholars, but they are united in at least one regard—neither mentions ethics. Although both seem interested in cultivating egalitarian and enlivening relationships between students and teachers, they do not consider Bakhtin’s own ethical thinking and how it might be brought to bear on the teacher-student relationship.

The educationalist whose work most clearly embraces the ethico-ontological qualities of Bakhtinian dialogism is Eugene Matusov, who has made a career theorizing dialogue in terms of ontology with clear ethical implications. He refers to the majoritarians’ episteme-centric concept of dialogue as “instrumental” or “technological,” and has developed a robust concept and practice of what he calls “ontological” or “authorial” dialogue (Matusov, 2009, 2011; Matusov, Smith, Soslau, Marjanovic-Shane, & Von Duyke, 2016). Like Wegeriff (2008), Matusov’s critique is based on the Bakhtinian understanding that to be in any meaningful way is to be in dialogue, and therefore, that dialogue is not simply a mode of communication among others. From this perspective, any kind of teaching is inherently dialogic, regardless of how monological it may seem. At the same time, however, he insists that some pedagogies and teacher-student

interactions are better than others inasmuch as they fundamentally respect each individual's humanity, agency, and authorial meaning-making. In other words, he is concerned with the quality of dialogue and not dialogue per se (which, after all, is always already in progress), attending in particular to the way individuals in dialogue are allowed and encouraged to transcend "the given," including their understandings of themselves, each other, the world, and the curriculum.

For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to this kind of Dialogue (having to do with the ethical quality of dialogue) with a capital letter to distinguish it from ontological dialogue. With this usage, terms such as "dialogue" and "dialogic" refer to the way human existence takes place in response to other people and things—it is simply the way things are and is not, therefore, necessarily good—while "Dialogue" and "Dialogic" refer to an ethically optimal way of responding. Using these terms, the premise of Matusov's argument is that, because we exist in the world dialogically, we ought to relate to each other Dialogically; doing so maximizes the possibilities of generative and lively becoming; anything else limits, distorts, and perverts those possibilities. With this understanding, Matusov and others (e.g., Sidorkin, 1999; Wegerif, 2008) view Dialogue not as a means to some pedagogical end, but as the end of education itself, though what exactly that means and how it might be realized or at least approximated in practice remain open questions—questions I hope to entertain in this dissertation.

Before doing so, however, I want to underscore once more the current state of the field, so it is clear how my re-reading of Bakhtin with a focus on ethics responds to extant conversations. I do this by briefly examining a handbook on dialogic education that was published after I had already written several chapters of my dissertation. As I read through the many contributions, echoes of the exchanges and divisions between majoritarians and contrarians

mentioned above were clearly evident. In the editors' introduction, for example, Wegerif, Mercer, & Major (2019) feel it necessary to differentiate between the epistemological and ontological definitions of dialogue as they introduce the handbook. Although they suggest that these perspectives are "interconnected and not incompatible" (p. 3), it is evident from the handbook contributors' overwhelming orientation toward epistemology that the ontology-minded contrarians remain a minority. It is worth pausing and considering this handbook as a useful snapshot of the field with regards to both the centrality of Bakhtin in education research on dialogue and the way Bakhtinian dialogism has been taken up by education researchers. Note, first, that nearly two thirds of the chapters (33/55) cite Bakhtin at least once. Relative to dialogic education, at least, Bakhtin is an influential theorist whose work is canonical. As noted, however, the majority of the researchers who draw on Bakhtin are rather episteme-centric. In this handbook, for example, of the over 300 references to Bakhtin, only a handful consider the ethics inherent in his dialogic worldview. The vast majority of these references focus instead on language and learning, highlighting well-known concepts like internally persuasive discourse, heteroglossia, and addressivity, and encouraging educators to view students as active meaning-makers who can benefit from responding to a diversity of voices and ideas. Although there are some ethical implications in these ideas, the predominant focus is on how these Bakhtinian concepts can be employed in order to understand and improve episodes of student learning.

Consider, as a representative example, Skidmore's (2019) justification for studying and enacting dialogic pedagogy, in which he explicitly cites Bakhtin:

[P]edagogy which relies heavily on a monologic mode of address, which 'pretends to be the ultimate word' (Bakhtin, 1929/1984, pp. 292–293), where what the teacher says is right 'because I say so', runs the risk of being self-defeating. If we do not give students

the opportunity to voice doubt and uncertainty, we have no way of knowing how successful our teaching has been and miss the chance to offer a different explanation or illustration which might dispel any remaining confusion. (p. 36)

In this instance, Skidmore, manifesting broader patterns in the field, seems primarily interested in the effectiveness of dialogic pedagogy which, as he notes earlier in the chapter, “seeks to enlist learners as active participants in the process of knowledge production” (p. 35). Reading Bakhtin as something of a constructivist educator, Skidmore focuses on how his ideas can be employed to facilitate learning, largely ignoring that Bakhtin was not simply interested in the production of knowledge but in the dialogic production of the world.

As noted, Skidmore shares this general approach to dialogue and to Bakhtin with many other scholars who likewise ignore the ethico-ontological aspects of dialogism. In particular, the ethical component of Bakhtinian thought has been largely ignored in education research (and, it seems, more broadly), a lacuna noticed by Ewald (1993), Hicks (2000), Juzwik (2004) and Morson (2007). One of the reasons the ethical character of Bakhtin’s thinking has sometimes been overlooked or underplayed by both majoritarians and contrarians is the order in which his writing was made available to English speakers. Indeed, Bakhtin’s early writing (Bakhtin, 1990, 1993), which makes his interest in ethics most explicit, was published in English after his later work (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986b) in which ethical considerations are mostly implicit. As a result, the field tends to be more familiar with the later work (which was published in English earlier). The handbook of dialogic education I have been discussing reflects this tendency, as *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1981), is cited in 21 chapters, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1984) is cited in 14, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1986) is cited in 10, *Art and Answerability* (1990) is cited in two, and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993) is cited in one.

The pattern is clear: The later it was published in English (and the more explicitly it deals with ethics), the less likely it is to be cited. As a field, we are relatively ignorant about Bakhtin's own vision of ethical Dialogue.

Although some believe that Bakhtin intentionally moved away from ethics over time as he became more interested in language and literature, following Morson & Emerson (1989, 1990), Steinby & Klapuri (2013), and others (see Falconer, Makhlin, & Renfrew, 1997), I believe that his later thinking retains the early work's interest in ethics. The key to this interpretation is understanding that, for Bakhtin, every utterance is a form of authorship that actively configures the world in certain ways, and literature is simply a special instance of human uttering that is not, however, different in kind from other, more quotidian utterances. In this light, Bakhtin's analyses of novels, genres, and language can be seen as explorations of how people author the world and their own and others' place in it—and how they ought to do so. These explorations have an evaluative, ethical quality because, for Bakhtin, utterances are not simply addressed and responsive to other people but participate in the ongoing authoring of those people. Whenever we compose a text or articulate an utterance, we do so dialogically, in relation to and partial authorship of ourselves and others, and that dialogic relating/authoring may be more or less Dialogic.

To review, the large body of literature on classroom dialogue is largely episteme-centric, focusing primarily on how dialogic pedagogy is better and more effective than other, more monological approaches. This paradigm, together with the unfortunate order in which Bakhtin's writings were published in English, has shaped the way the field tends to take up Bakhtin, generally ignoring his ethical thought and employing Bakhtinian ideas in service of learning rather than relational becoming. Even among the ontology-minded contrarians, the nature of

Dialogic ethics is usually only vaguely implied. Responding to these gaps, in what follows, I provide an overview of Bakhtin's ethico-onto-epistemological worldview, with particular attention to the qualities that make a given relation/utterance more or less Dialogic.

Theoretical Framework: Dialogue as an Ethical Relationship

I begin with Holquist's (1990) pithy summary of the foundation of Bakhtin's thinking: "we are all unique, but we are never alone" (p. xxvi). Another way to put this is to say that while each individual is unique, no one is entirely distinct. Indeed, as Bakhtin's later and best-known work wonderfully describes, we exist in response to others, in a long chain of addressivity, fundamentally interrelated and interdependent for meaningful existence. At the same time, however, this interpenetration of self and Other does not diminish the uniqueness of each. Indeed, in one of his earliest known works, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin (1993) introduces both the answerable self, the self that occupies a unique place in existence and is "compellent non-coinciding with anything that is not I" (p. 42), and the architectonic self that is partly constituted in its relationship with the Other. Much of what makes us unique, it seems, are the various ways we find ourselves interconnected with others at a given point in time/space. Put simply, at the foundation of Bakhtin's ethico-onto-epistemology is the simple but profound reality that I exist in response to other I's—this is the lens through which Bakhtin seeks to make sense of the world. As he notes at the end of his first major treatise, "Life knows two value-centers that are fundamentally and essentially different, yet are correlated with each other: myself and the other; and it is around these centers that all of the concrete moments of Being are distributed and arranged" (1993, p. 74). What this lens affords us is, to borrow a metaphor from Morson (2004), a kind of binocular vision in which the world is understood from (and is understood as being constituted by) multiple perspectives simultaneously.

How does this paradigm inform a vision of ethics? Before directly addressing this question, consider, first, three generic ways we might think about what it means to respond ethically to the Other: The first is a simplistic version of the golden rule which suggests that we ought to treat others as we would like to be treated; the second is what is called the platinum rule which suggests that we ought to treat others as they would like to be treated; the third is an approach that relies on normative ideals like justice. Each of these approaches falls short of Bakhtin's Dialogic vision because they impose a single perspective on a multiperspectival reality, a single voice on a dialogue. The golden rule, at least in this simplistic formulation, implicitly assumes that the Other is like the self and would want what the self wants, effacing the alterity of the Other. The platinum rule has the opposite problem in that it effaces the self in subservience to the Other. The third approach is simply an abstract version of the same problems. Although it is possible to appeal to an ideal like justice in theory, what that ideal actually means in practice represents somebody's perspective; if the self agrees with that perspective, it is like the golden rule; if the Other agrees, it is like the platinum rule. The overarching problem in any of these approaches is the way they disregard the reality of unique and interdependent persons in favor of a single individual.

What Bakhtin invites us to consider is how we might approach the question of ethics binocularly or, as he put it in his analysis of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, to see and respond to (i.e., to author) our social reality as "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, [who] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). From this perspective, what is required ethically is a kind of "interpenetration and constant oscillation between self and other" (Emerson, 1995, p. 109). In my reading of Bakhtin, this

notion of the ethical relationship between self and Other that allows for mutual growth and meaningful becoming is the unifying thread across all his writing.

Consider, for instance, Bakhtin's discussion of the centripetal and centrifugal dynamics in language and culture. Recall that Bakhtin (1981) sees every utterance as "a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies" (p. 272)—one which tends toward unification, centralization, and homogenization (centripetal), and one which tends toward individuation, fragmentation and diversification (centrifugal). Bakhtin does not explicitly relate these concepts to ethics—they are generally invoked when discussing how languages evolve over time (e.g., what is considered "correct English")—however, their ethical relevance becomes clear when we remember that, for Bakhtin, language does not exist in the abstract but is always embodied by actual people in concrete interactions. From this perspective, what is at stake in the centripetal and centrifugal qualities of language is, fundamentally, the relation of self and Other. Indeed, at their extremes, centripetal language systems (e.g., "newspeak" in *1984*) can be understood as those which impose the Other's words and perspectives on the self, while centrifugal language systems (e.g., the confused languages of Babel) are those which disregard the Other or disallow their response. In both cases, the issue is the exclusion of unique interlocutors, as either the self or Other is rendered incapable of a meaningful response, and the disruption of Dialogue.

For Bakhtin, Dialogue is a relationship characterized by vitality—generative and meaningful becoming—while monologues are sterile, lifeless, deadening, and inert. What the centripetal/centrifugal metaphor clarifies is that Dialogic vitality can break down in two directions. In other words, Dialogue should not be understood as simply being on one end of a continuum with Monologue at the opposite end, but as living within a dynamic tension between

two monologic extremes, that is, between the self-without-the-Other and the Other-without-the-self (see Figure 1 below). In this light, Dialogue comes to be seen as a tension-filled practice/relationship that consists neither of simply asserting oneself or deferring to the Other, but of some combination of both which allows self and Other to interrelate in such a way that they “combine but are not merged” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6)—that they are brought together (centripetal) and yet remain distinct (centrifugal).

Figure 1: Dialogic Continuum



What are the qualities of responses that afford such relationships? This is the question I seek to answer below, making explicit what has hitherto only been vaguely implied and gestured toward in the literature. Drawing primarily on concepts from Bakhtin’s oeuvre, I offer a three-part framework that names and characterizes the “dimensions” of a Dialogic response. I offer these *dimensions of Dialogue* not so much as a definition (with its connotations of finality) but as sensitizing concepts that can help us attune to the ethical qualities and potential of a given interaction. I hope that making explicit the qualities that make a given utterance Dialogic will empower us to better understand, enact, and cultivate Dialogic relations in classroom discussions and beyond.

Dimensions of Dialogue

The three dimensions I consider are: 1) *answerability*, which is primarily oriented to how one speaks from one’s own unique perspective, 2) *responsiveness*, which is primarily oriented to how one responds to the Other, and 3) *capacitation*, which is primarily oriented to how one

affords the Other opportunities to respond. Simply put, answerability is about my obligation to myself, responsiveness is about my obligation to you, and capacitation is about how we facilitate each other's responses. In actual practice, however, these dynamics are interrelated, which is only fitting in a Bakhtinian paradigm in which self and Other are never entirely distinct.

Answerability. Answerability is the way Bakhtin's term *otvetstvennost'* tends to be translated in English, though the Russian word is closer to the more colloquial "responsibility." For my purposes here, I will use the term "answerability" and its derivations when I am referring to Bakhtin's particular understanding of Dialogic responsibility, and I will use "responsibility" for its more generic meaning. For Bakhtin, answerability derives from the ontological fact that each individual occupies a unique place in the world. He writes, "I occupy a place in once-occurrent Being that is unique and never-repeatable," adding that this uniqueness is "compellently obligatory" (1993, p. 40). The spatial language Bakhtin uses here affords an ocular metaphor (see Bakhtin 1993, p. 62-63): From my particular vantage point, I see the world in a way that no one else does. In a sense, I am the only eyewitness of some aspect of reality, and this fact obligates me to be a witness, to share what only I have seen. Bakhtin (1993) refers to this obligation as a "non-alibi in Being" (p. 40). Because I occupy a unique place in existence, I can never claim that someone else was in my place or that I was elsewhere. I never have an alibi; I am always responsible. To acknowledge and act from this responsibility is to live answerably.

Expounding on this idea, Bakhtin compares an answerable way of being to signing one's name to a document, writing that life lived without this sense of obligative uniqueness is like "an unsigned document...[or] a rough draft." He goes on to say that "only through the answerable participation effected by a unique act or deed can one get out of the realm of endless draft versions and rewrite one's life once and for all in the form of a fair copy" (p. 44). I take "a

unique act or deed” to mean that the act is one’s own, performed without an alibi, from one’s particular place in existence. “Answerable participation,” then, is taking part in life in this way—as oneself, with skin in the game, with one’s name on the line, being willing to take responsibility for what one does and what one is uniquely capable of doing. It is to respond to the concrete particularity of each moment as oneself, uniquely positioned and obligated by that uniqueness. This is no easy task. Indeed, writing at the end of his life, Bakhtin (1986) returned to these ideas, saying, “The *I* hides in the other and in others, it wants to be only an other for others, to enter completely into the world of others as an other, and to cast from itself the burden of being the only *I* (*I-for-myself*) in the world” (p. 147), echoing his earlier recognition that people are not always disposed to shoulder the burden inherent in their uniqueness: “I can try to prove my alibi in Being, I can pretend to be someone I am not. I can abdicate from my *obligative* (*ought-to-be*) uniqueness (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 42).

Abdicating one’s obligative uniqueness is an understandable but problematic response to the risks of an answerable life. It is risky to sign one’s name, to take responsibility for one’s words and choices, to relinquish the chance to claim an alibi. Sensing some possible embarrassment, discomfort, or liability, one might understandably protect the self by avoiding accountability. But that avoidance ultimately detracts from the integrity of the self and, because the self is always in dialogue with the Other, from the potential to enrich the Other. For Bakhtin (1990), an integral self is not constituted by stable characteristics so much as it is by the acknowledgement and acceptance of one’s answerability in each concrete moment. The meaningful world is characterized by constant flux as it is always in the process of being re-authored, along with the people who populate it. In such a world, one’s identity cannot be stable. Against that backdrop, Bakhtin (1990) asks, “But what guarantees the inner connection of the

constituent elements of a person?” His answer: “Only the unity of answerability...An individual must become answerable through and through: all of his constituent moments must not only fit next to each other in the temporal sequence of his life, but must also interpenetrate each other in the unity of guilt and answerability” (p. 2). It is through a chain of responses, not a chain of events that we become who we are, and the quality of our responses are of utmost importance. Although the creation of an integral self may be, as Morson & Emerson (1990) suggest, “the work of a lifetime” (p. 31), it comes to be as individuals respond answerably to each moment.

This kind of answerable integrity is important not only for the self, but also for the Other, who may benefit from unique outside perspectives². This benefit derives from what Bakhtin (1990) calls the “excess of my seeing in relation to another human being” (p. 24). Given that each individual is uniquely situated in existence, no one’s field of vision ever entirely overlaps with another’s; each can see what others cannot. In Bakhtin’s view, this simultaneous surplus and lack bind self and Other together in a state of interdependency and complementarity. In this light, Bakhtin’s (1986) discussion of how great literary works “outgrow what they were in the epoch of their creation” (p. 4) can be seen as parallel to what happens to the Other when the self shares aspects of its excess of seeing. Referring to the way Shakespeare’s plays continue to generate new insights, Bakhtin explains, “The author is a captive of his epoch, of his own present. Subsequent times liberate him from that captivity” (p. 5). Analogously, each individual is a captive in their own place in existence and can be “liberated” by someone who stands elsewhere, with an excess of seeing relative to them. Seeing things that I cannot, the Other

² The ocular metaphor easily lends itself to an episteme-centric understanding. I intend “perspectives” here broadly, as more than ideas and opinions, but also feelings, stories, and presence.

invites me to move beyond my current field of vision; without them, I am bound to and by my own perspective.

Regarding answerability, it is the self's obligation to share aspects of its excess of seeing. However, there is a danger: One's excess of seeing can fuel the assumption that the Other is entirely transparent and knowable—"finalizable" is Bakhtin's (1984) term (p. 61). Thus, rather than finalizing the Other, the self must seek to "consummate" them (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 14), offering a unique outside perspective that supplements their current understanding, but respecting their "holy of holies" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 59), their potential to transcend categorization, resist definition, and respond differently than expected. Meditating on this in relation to Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, which he seems to view as a model of ethical self-Other relationships, Bakhtin (1984) writes,

"the author's consciousness does not transform others' consciousnesses...into objects, and does not give them secondhand and finalizing definitions. Alongside and in front of itself it senses others' equally valid consciousnesses, just as infinite and open-ended as itself. It reflects and re-creates not a world of objects, but precisely these other consciousnesses with their worlds, re-creates them in their authentic unfinalizability (which is, after all, their essence)." (p. 68).

This is the key—to speak as a unique self while recognizing that the Other is just as unique and open-ended. Answerability refers to the first part, and responsiveness, the subsequent dimension of dialogue, refers to the latter part. Indeed, responsiveness can be understood as the flipside of answerability in that it involves viewing the Other as a unique and answerable self for whom oneself is an Other who stands to benefit from their unique perspective.

Responsiveness. I characterize responsiveness as a dynamic openness and careful attention toward the Other which entails an ongoing cycle of attuning to the particularities of one's interlocutor(s) and adjusting accordingly. I appreciate the adjective "careful" as a modifier of the noun "attention" because of the way it implies thoroughness, but also suggests a certain benevolence. Indeed, Bakhtin (1990) goes so far as to suggest, "What I must be for the other, God is for me. What the other surmounts and repudiates within himself as an unworthy given, I accept in him and that with loving mercy as the other's cherished flesh" (p. 56). Bakhtin who was by all accounts a faithful, if somewhat unorthodox believer, sees in Christ a divine example of what he calls *vzhivanie* or "live entering" (sometimes translated as "living into" or "active empathy"), in which the self (Christ) addresses the Other from a position of both outsideness and love—the kind of love that allows one "to make serious extended incursions into the depths of the other, to take seriously its unfinishedness" (Emerson, 2000, p. 18), to deeply understand but never to determine, to live alongside but never to merge.

Bakhtin (1984) scours Dostoevsky's books for examples of characters who demonstrate or fall short of this mode of self/Other relating. For instance, in describing how Alyosha Karamazov fails to relate ethically to the impoverished Captain Snegirev, he writes, "Alyosha analyzes Snegirev's emotional state and, as it were, *predetermines* his further behavior by *predicting* that next time he would *without fail* take the money." He then quotes Liza, who implicitly recognizes this as a non-Dialogic relation. She questions Alyosha, "aren't we showing contempt for him, for that poor man—in analyzing his soul like this, as it were, from above, eh?" (p. 60). In analyzing Snegirev "from above," Alyosha abuses his outsideness, finalizing the poor Captain, rather than Dialogically "consummating" him; he assumes he has entirely understood

the man, rather than using his admittedly partial understanding to respond carefully and openly and to invite further response.

By the end of the book, however, Alyosha seems to have grown in his active empathy. As he speaks to his guilt-ridden brother Ivan, Alyosha senses Ivan's inner conflict, including voices that desired and theoretically justified their father's murder, voices that Ivan is only beginning to recognize himself. Sensing that Ivan may eventually conclude that he is guilty of murder, in essence finalizing himself as a patricide, Alyosha invites Ivan to consider his responsibility for the murder, but also to recognize that he is not actually guilty of murder (see Wyman, 2016, pp. 202-203). By discerning Ivan's inner conflict and responding carefully, Alyosha is able to speak to his soul in a way that affords him an answerable response—taking responsibility but also remaining open to ongoing becoming. What Alyosha does with Ivan and fails to do with Snegirev is to maintain two distinct, unfinalized, and answerable voices. In the first example, he erases Snegirev's voice; in the second, he preserves Ivan's. In both instances, he empathizes with his interlocutor, but only in the latter does he use that empathic understanding to respond from his outside position in a way that allows for a meaningful response and growth.

Bakhtin (1993) notes that one way to finalize the Other is “to see in every other, in every object of a given act or deed, not a concrete uniqueness which participates in Being personally, but a representative of a certain large whole” (p. 53). Recognizing that “Man-in-general does not exist; I exist and a particular concrete other exists” (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 47), the self must seek to understand and relate to the Other in their particularity, not simply because they are unique, but because they are always in the process of becoming something else. In the *Author and Hero* essay and later in the *Dostoevsky* book, Bakhtin discusses this in terms of (non)coincidence: As everyone occupies a unique location in Being, nobody “coincides” with anybody else (1990, p.

13), and as each person is also always in a state of becoming, nor do they ever entirely coincide with themselves (1984, p. 59). In carefully attending to the Other, the self must never lose sight of their radical alterity and unfinalizability.

Recall that responsiveness entails both a careful attention and dynamic openness toward the Other. One kind of dynamic openness is part of carefully attending—being open to the possibility that one has not entirely understood the Other, that there is more to understand; one might even deliberately approach the encounter, expecting to be surprised (Matusov et al., 2016). Another kind of dynamic openness has to do with willingness to adjust in response to the Other, to change as a result of one’s encounter with the Other. This is what Warnick, Yacek, & Robinson (2018) refer to as the “responsibility to be moved” (p. 36). Two of the fundamental ways in which the self might be moved are in its mode of addressing the Other and in its own position relative to the Other. Referring to understanding a work of art, but with ethical implications, Bakhtin (1986) writes, “The person who understands must not reject the possibility of changing or even abandoning his already prepared viewpoints and positions. In the act of understanding, a struggle occurs that results in mutual change and enrichment” (p. 142). In order for a self/Other relationship to be mutually enriching, the self must be willing to be responsively moved.

In sum, responsiveness has to do with attending carefully to the Other and maintaining a dynamic openness in relation to them. It involves a recognition that each individual is unique and open-ended (i.e., unfinalized), and thus incomprehensible in terms of abstract categories. The Other is a subject, like the self, and must be related to as such, not as an object. A subject-subject relation can be understood in terms of “live entering,” in which interlocutors relate to each other with both empathy and outsidership, and with a willingness to be moved.

Capacitation. The third dimension of Dialogue has to do with how one's responses to the Other enable them to respond in certain ways, bridging the gap between self and Other in their ongoing interrelations. In a sense, this is an aspect of "live entering," in which, after empathizing with the Other and returning to one's own place in Being, one replies to the Other in a way that combines the perspectives of outsidership and empathy, offering to the Other a unique and potentially enriching perspective. Morson & Emerson (1990) describe the process thus: "Without trying to finalize the other or define him once and for all, one uses one's 'outsiderness' and experience to ask the right sort of questions. Recognizing the other's capacity for change, one provokes or invites him to reveal and outgrow himself" (p. 242). This is what Alyosha, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, does for his brother Ivan, as described above—by providing Ivan with a unique outside and empathic perspective, Alyosha enables him to respond in a way that he does not seem capable of on his own.

In Bakhtin's (1984) account, Dostoevsky, like his most heroic protagonist, learned to author his characters in a way that renders them capable of responding. He explains that "the author's discourse about a character is organized as discourse about someone actually present, someone who hears him (the author) and is capable of answering him" (p. 63). Indeed, one of the things that makes Dostoevsky's writing so remarkable to Bakhtin is that the characters do not seem predetermined and entirely subject to the author's vision; rather, Dostoevsky enables his characters to respond to him, something that is evident in his creative process:

"Dostoevsky did not first work out a structure, plan, or overall plot of the work. Rather, he first imagined specific 'voices,' that is, integral personalities with their own ideas and sense of the world...Dostoevsky then...contrived situations that could provoke these people into dialogue with each other and with his own views. Characters join in dialogue,

Dostoevsky himself may in some form participate, and the characters (perhaps also the author) outgrow themselves in the process. Sometimes Dostoevsky continues the dialogue in new scenes; at other times, he leaves preliminary dialogues in his notebooks and starts anew with characters recently made more complex.” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 245)

Although most interactions between people look very different from Dostoevsky’s drafting, there are principles of Dialogue that are applicable across these situations. Like Dostoevsky, one ought to view (and author) one’s interlocutors without predetermined notions of who they are and what they will do, and must provide space and develop processes through which to enable the Other to respond movingly, in ways that will enrich both self and Other, rendering them capable of continued interactions.

Although Haraway (2016) is no Bakhtinian, I find her ethico-onto-epistemological perspective of “rendering-capable” (p. 16) to be resonant with this dimension of Dialogue. Haraway finds inspiration for her thinking in the work of Vinciane Despret, who studies relationships between humans and non-human animals, a particularly interesting instance of self/Other relationships. In a provocative analysis with implications for interpersonal communication, Despret (2008) suggests that, in practice, the question of whether or not parrots can talk is not so much about “what parrots *are* but what they might be *rendered capable of*” in relationship with interested and invested humans (p. 127, emphasis added). If assemblages of people, parrots, and various technologies can render each other mutually capable of communication, surely aspiring Dialogic interlocutors can do at least as much. Despret adds that one ought to not only render the Other *capable* of response but render them *interesting* in their response. This requires what she calls “polite” questions, a term she uses to refer to the “capacity

of a question to render the person to whom it is addressed interesting. An impolite question makes people rather uninteresting, unreflexive and – it is related – uninterested” (p. 138). In this sense, a capacitating turn at talk affords and facilitates the Other’s response, manifesting qualities such as comprehensibility, cogency, and hospitality—qualities which would render an interlocutor capable, willing, and welcome to respond.

In sum, capacitation connects responsiveness and answerability, building on the self’s careful attention and dynamic openness to the Other and enabling them to respond to oneself (and, perhaps, to others). A capacitating response offers a unique outside perspective and renders the Other capable of responding—and responding well.

Following the Dimensions of Dialogue

Taken together, the dimensions of Dialogue provide a framework for attuning to the ethico-ontological qualities of classroom interactions. By approaching classroom discussions in terms of relational becoming rather than learning, we will find that we need to ask different questions of our data, our interlocutors, and ourselves. Consider, for example, some of the practices that have been highlighted in the literature on dialogic pedagogy: teachers asking open-ended, authentic questions; students initiating turn chains and responding to each other; teachers attending carefully to students’ ideas and taking them up subsequently; and students and teachers co-constructing knowledge of the subject matter. These practices strike me as having much potential both pedagogically and, perhaps, Dialogically, but it is also worth pausing and asking: To what question are these practices the answer? It seems to me that the question is something like, “What practices depart from the traditional IRE approach and are likely to lead to better learning?” As an answer to that question, these practices make perfect sense. But that is a very different question than, “What are the qualities of classroom interlocutors’ relating and who are

they becoming together?” In what follows, I briefly consider how these questions might attune us to classroom discourse differently than the conventional episteme-centric approach.

Regarding the kinds of questions teachers ask, an ethico-ontological approach would be less interested in the form of a teacher’s question and more interested in the self-Other relationships that are implicated in the asking. We might consider how classroom interlocutors are rendered present and answerable as their unique selves. We might ask how the teacher is positioned not simply in terms of epistemic authority relative to the students, but as a person who is “noncoincident” with her role as the teacher. How does she show up in the classroom, who is she as she addresses students, how does she address students, and who do they become together?

Similarly, while we might be interested in the fact of students initiating turns at talk and responding to each other, we would bear in mind that the existence of a chain of responses alone is not evidence of ethical relating. Instead, we would attend to how they render themselves present, how they address each other, and in what ways they are moved in response.

As for teachers attending carefully to and taking up students’ ideas, we would want to know in what ways they attend to the students themselves—not simply their ideas—as embodied, storied, and relationally enmeshed persons who are more than bearers of ideas. What aspects of students’ multifaceted selves are teachers responsive to? Who are students implicitly understood to be and how are they addressed in the classroom? What kinds of responses does the teacher solicit, attend to, and take up?

Finally, while we may be interested in how knowledge is co-constructed in the classroom, we would also take a broader interest in the kind of world that is being co-constructed alongside the knowledge. Who are classroom interlocutors becoming together as they learn? How do they author themselves, each other, and the meaningful world?

In all of this, we would attend to the extent to which classroom interlocutors respond to each other answerably, responsively, and capacitatingly because these are the dimensions along which they develop ethical relations. This focuses us not simply on learning outcomes, but on the processual, relational qualities of education; not on truth, but on truing. This paradigmatic shift is important because the nature of facts, propositions, concepts, and principles—all the stuff of conventional education—is always already a function of dialogue. The more Dialogic that dialogue becomes, the better we can collaboratively author our shared world. What we stand to gain by pursuing this path is not effectiveness, but vitality—not technology, but human life.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The format of this dissertation may be misleading because it implies that the above framework preceded my research and that whatever methodology I outline in this chapter was fully formed prior to my fieldwork. This is not the case. Although I began with some ideas about Dialogue, my understanding of its ethico-onto-epistemological nature developed both as I continued to read and respond to Bakhtin and as I engaged in what will be labeled as data collection and analysis. I began my research with a desire to cultivate Dialogue in the context of classroom discussions about controversial issues, but my sense of what it means to be in Dialogue has evolved throughout the research process. As I will explain more fully below, my data collection consisted of recording the discussions and meta-communicative activities I facilitated with three different groups of adolescents. I originally imagined that my analysis would focus on how Dialogue emerged in these groups and what we might learn from this in terms of pedagogy. However, as I worked with these groups and as my understanding of Dialogue evolved, I became less comfortable with claims about when and to what extent Dialogue emerged, and I became more interested in understanding Dialogue as an ethico-onto-epistemological practice/relationship—and, given the field’s prevailing focus on epistemology, I have prioritized its ethico-ontological qualities. This does not mean that I have entirely abandoned my original project of understanding how best to cultivate Dialogue in the context of classroom discussions, but it seems to me that the first step in that project ought to be becoming attuned to the nature of the thing I intend to cultivate. I hope that this dissertation will contribute at least in that regard, facilitating others’ attunement to Dialogue (as it has mine).

From the beginning, I have oriented to my research from a qualitative paradigm, seeking to describe and characterize aspects of our discussions that seemed particularly relevant to my

goals of cultivating Dialogue and, later, attuning to the ethico-ontological qualities of our interactions. Although my focus shifted over time, the object of my study is the d/Dialogue itself. Having facilitated the discussions of three groups of young people, I have sought retrospectively to understand something of the ethico-ontological reality and potentiality of our time together—what happened ethically and ontologically, why, and what we might do differently moving forward. This approach privileges my outside perspective over that of any of the participants, including my own in-the-moment perspective as a participant-observer. Although such an approach would be inappropriate with regards to any number of studies, I believe it is justifiable here because I do not seek to explain the intentions, meanings, or experiences of the participants. Instead, I seek to understand and theorize Dialogue in ethico-ontological terms, something that for many of my participants was beyond the scope of their interest and, most likely, beyond their conscious awareness. As a participant in the discussions myself, much of what I will share in the upcoming chapters has only become clear to me in retrospect.

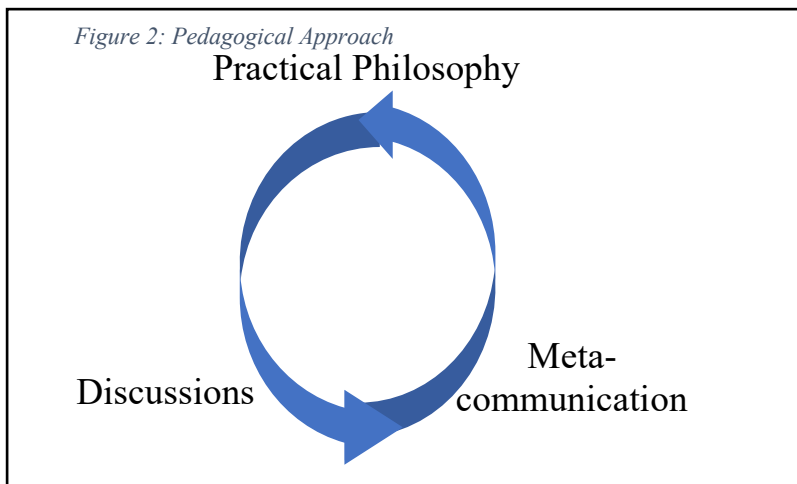
With that preface, I now describe the methodology of my study, which can be understood as taking place in two temporal phases: In the first, acting as a teacher-researcher and participant-observer, I facilitated a series of discussions and reflections with three groups of adolescents, in an effort to understand the nature of Dialogue and how it might be cultivated in the context of classroom discussions about controversial issues. The first group was composed of college freshmen and the final two were composed of ninth graders. I began working with the first group in early 2019 and concluded my work with the final group in early 2020. Although I think the overall methodology of my study might best be described as “thinking with theory” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017), this initial phase of my research can be understood as a teacher self-study (Tidwell et al., 2009), in which I continually sought to better foster Dialogue in each group,

adjusting my approach in response to my emerging understandings of Dialogue, on-the-ground experiences, and the needs and idiosyncrasies of each group. After each session, I would review my records, create a content log, and write a memo about how the session had gone, what stood out to me, and ideas for subsequent discussions, and this would inform my ongoing facilitation work.

After the conclusion of these rounds of facilitation and data collection, I continued to study the records of the discussions with the intent to better understand what had happened and what I might do differently in future. This second phase of research can be understood as a microethnographic discourse analysis. As Bloome, Carter, Morton, Otto, & Shuart-Faris (2005) explain, this methodology does not purport to uncover a “true” description of some interactional event; instead, it is a response to the event that, in responding, also theorizes the event in terms of language use (p. xvii). As noted, my analysis seeks to theorize the language use of people-in-d/Dialogue in ethico-ontological terms, as a process of what I will call “relational becoming” rather than an episteme-centric process of coming to understand certain concepts.

Data Collection

My research involved three separate groups of adolescents (which will be described subsequently) who met together with some regularity over four to seven weeks, depending on the



group. My work with each group revolved around a cycle of discussions and metacommunicative activities, through which I hoped we would individually and collectively

develop practical philosophies regarding the Dialogic ideal that would inform our ongoing discussions, as illustrated in Figure 2. As I will explain, we did not always arrive at the same understandings of the meaning and practice of Dialogue, and this led to some interesting tensions and conversations in the groups, as will be discussed.

The topics of discussion were proposed by group members and selected through a vote, and I facilitated the discussions and metacommunicative activities. The way I facilitated each discussion changed over time both within and between groups, as my understanding of Dialogue and the needs of my student-interlocutors evolved. At times, I facilitated the discussions with a light hand, letting the discussion flow organically, sometimes even explicitly removing myself from the conversation, while at other times, I took a more heavy-handed approach, intervening to preempt or repair what seemed to me to be non-Dialogic interactions or asking students to practice certain discursive moves (see Chapter 5). Although my facilitation style was related to my understanding of Dialogue, the two were not seamlessly connected. I think it is more accurate to say that they responded to each other than that one flowed from the other. This is partly due to my evolving perspective on the nature of Dialogue, but even in moments when my understanding was more settled, the pedagogical implications were not always apparent to me.

One of the reasons it was challenging to facilitate these discussions is because Dialogue, as a relational practice, is constituted in the tension between self and Other; it cannot simply be implemented but must respond dynamically to the particularities of a given situation. In other words, to respond answerably, responsively, and capacitantly to the Other is not merely to speak frankly, to take up the ideas of one's interlocutors, and/or to facilitate their responses (or any other way in which we might operationalize the dimensions of Dialogue), though each of these may indeed play a role, but to discern when and how to do so. Put concretely, for example,

it may sometimes be appropriate for teachers/facilitators to share their own perspective on the topic at hand, but there are other moments when doing so may limit the kinds of responses students feel comfortable making. In moments like this, which dimension of Dialogue should be prioritized: answerability or capacitation?

Questions of the scale at which we ought to study and engage in Dialogue further complicate the work of facilitation. For instance, while a lecture may seem monologic, at a broader scale of time/space in which teacher and students are able to respond meaningfully to each other, it might be considered Dialogic. Accepting that Dialogic relations can be realized across scales larger than those of single conversations, I was confronted with the question of the scale at which I ought to be seeking to cultivate Dialogue. Would it be appropriate to require students to read certain texts or to prescribe certain behaviors? At what point would that kind of teacher direction become monological? I do not pretend to have found any final answers to these theoretical questions, let alone the pragmatic concern of how to pedagogically foster Dialogue among a small group of young people. Despite this uncertainty, I proceeded to feel my way through these discussions, facilitating them as best I could in the moment. In retrospect, I see much that I would now do differently.

As noted, one of the ways I sought to cultivate Dialogue was through a variety of metacommunicative activities. The purpose of these activities was to help students critically consider how they responded to each other and, hopefully, to move beyond habitual responses. The activities took a variety of forms, the most basic of which involved reflecting verbally or in writing on past discussions and considering what we might do differently in upcoming discussions. On occasion, I would provide students with a transcript of a portion of our discussions or show them an excerpt from the video recording, and we would base our

reflections on those records. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5 (see p. 125), I provided students with an excerpt of our previous conversation and invited them to identify and discuss moments in which we seemed to be speaking as ourselves (i.e., answerably). Together, we raised questions about the value of that kind of discourse and considered how we might have engaged in the discussion differently. I would also sometimes ask students to practice certain “moves” (e.g., reflective listening) and discuss their Dialogic potential. For instance, noticing that students in Group 3 did not ask many follow-up questions, even after rather ambiguous comments from the classmates, during our meta-communicative reflections on February 25, 2020, I showed them a video clip of what struck me as a missed opportunity—a moment when one of the students said something that afforded follow-up questions but none were asked—and invited them to generate possible questions they might have asked in that moment. We then re-enacted that part of the conversation, seeking to understand each other better through follow-up questions, and then continued discussing the topic (see discussion of “looping for understanding” in Chapter 5, p. 145).

My observations of our discussions and metacommunicative activities informed my ongoing facilitation work. Although there was some carryover between groups in terms of how I would facilitate each group’s conversations, I approached each group somewhat differently, depending on their feedback, my sense of their needs, and my takeaways from previous groups.

Group 1

Group 1 consisted of seven college freshmen at a prestigious private university in a large Southeastern city who enrolled in a one-credit elective course about talking across political

differences. I designed and taught this course along with Keith³, my co-facilitator, during the first half of the Spring 2019 semester. During this time, the group met together once a week, each meeting lasting for two hours. We met in a small classroom on campus where we sat around a few tables grouped together in the middle of the room. The space was small, but so was the group. Keith and I generally provided simple refreshments which we snacked on throughout the class. The course included weekly readings about Dialogic ethics and pragmatics, and students wrote regular reflections and a final paper in which they articulated their personal philosophy of Dialogue (see course syllabus in Appendix A). In addition to collecting these documents, I recorded our meetings, which consisted of discussions about controversial issues and meta-communicative activities in which we reflected on the quality of our discussions. After the conclusion of the course, I also conducted exit interviews with each student, in which we reflected together on their experience in the course. The interviews were loosely structured and consisted of questions about what participants had learned, how they conceptualized the dialogic ideal, and how they felt they and their classmates had approximated that ideal, including in specific moments I would highlight (see Appendix B for interview protocol). In all, I collected audio- and/or video-recordings of approximately 15.5 hours of our time together.

Table 1: Group 1 Composition

GROUP 1		
David*	White	M
Keith*	White	M
Liam	White (Germany)	M
Makenzie	Black	F
Anand	Asian American (India)	M
Brodie	White	M
Ted	White	M
Jane	White	F
Savannah	White	F

³ All names other than my own are pseudonyms.

Joe**	Black	M
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*Instructors/facilitators

**Joe was Makenzie's brother, a college senior, who was invited to the final discussion of the group.

Participants in Group 1 are listed in Table 1 above. The students came from a variety of academic backgrounds, but all expressed interest in participating in discussions about polarizing topics and in learning to do so better. The elective they enrolled in was one among many offered to freshmen which were supposed to provide an immersive introduction to some topic of interest. There were several students who initially enrolled but withdrew from the course after the first meeting. One of these students, a self-proclaimed conservative, withdrew because he did not feel comfortable participating in discussions that would be recorded, noting that people had lost jobs, spouses, and businesses due to opinions they had expressed decades earlier which had fallen into disrepute. There was also one student who dropped out a couple weeks into the semester due to sickness. Every student who remained enrolled consented to participate in the study.

As an introductory activity, we asked students to share with the group their political orientation to get a sense of the diversity of perspectives represented in the group. As it turned out, most considered themselves somewhat left leaning politically, even if they did not necessarily identify with the Democratic party. Savannah, Makenzie, and Brodie were arguably the most liberal, and Ted was the most conservative, identifying as a libertarian. I explained that I had conservative sympathies but identified as a moderate, and Keith explained that, over time, he had become increasingly liberal. Over the course of our discussions, we continued to learn about each other, either in explicit get-to-know-you activities or spontaneously in our discussions. We learned, for example, that Anand came from a Hindu background, Jane was a practicing Christian, Brodie was an atheist, I was religious, and Savannah was not. Jane, Savannah, and Keith tended to talk the least during our discussions, and Brodie and Makenzie tended to talk the most. The group generally had a warm atmosphere, and students chatted with

each other amicably before and after class and during breaks. Several students mentioned to me that they had rarely developed friendships among classmates as they did in this course.

In general, Group 1’s discussions had a rather abstract, academic feel. This is likely related to the educational background of these highly successful students, who seemed to enjoy the chance to discuss big ideas together, exploring ideas and making arguments—sometimes, it seemed to me, just for fun and not out of any particular commitment to a certain position.

Although they had varying degrees of familiarity with certain topics, they were all articulate and well-practiced in classroom discussions. Ultimately, we had four different discussions: two on immigration, one on abortion, and one on physician-assisted suicide, each of which lasted approximately an hour. These were topics that group members proposed and voted on. In Table 2 below, I have summarized the schedule and focus of each of our meetings.

Table 2: Group 1 Calendar

GROUP 1 Meeting Schedule and Focus	
1/8/19	Introduction to course
1/15/19	Readings and metacommunication
1/22/19	Discussion 1 (Immigration)
1/29/19	Metacommunicative reflections Discussion 2 (Immigration)
2/5/19	Readings and metacommunicative reflections
2/12/19	Discussion 3 (Abortion)
2/19/19	Readings and metacommunicative reflections
2/26/19	Discussion 4 (Physician-assisted suicide)

Groups 2 and 3

Groups 2 and 3 consisted of high school freshmen at a linguistically and ethnically diverse urban high school in a large Southeastern city (see Table 3 below). Arriving at the school, visitors are admitted individually through the locked front door and must sign in at the front office, where the secretaries speak English and Spanish. The door out of the office into the school's front hallway is also locked, a small light on the door turning green when the secretaries remotely unlock it. The hallways themselves are clean and quiet during class time but become bustling thoroughfares when the bell rings. In the middle of a passing period, the hallways are so packed with students that it is hard to make a left-hand turn across the flow of traffic to enter a classroom on the opposite side. School staff members monitor the hallways, but usually seem to do so passively, on the off chance that something would happen that might require adult intervention, except when a “tardy sweep” is announced, in which case they loudly encourage students to move along and be on time for their next class.

Table 3: School Demographics

Percentage of Student Body (n=approx. 2000)	
White	29%
Hispanic/Latino	43%
Black/African American	20%
Asian	8%
Other	<1%
Economically Disadvantaged	34%
Limited English Proficiency	40%

The student body is divided into several “academies,” each with its own focus—engineering, information technology, health sciences, and interdisciplinary research. Students select their academy at the end of their freshman year, so the students I worked with had not yet made their selection, though most expressed interest in engineering and health services. None

indicated that they were considering interdisciplinary research, the academy I took to be the most academically elite and preparatory for college. (Although the other three academies could easily lead to further study in college, they also had a significant component of vocational education.)

The students who participated in this study volunteered to do so during their “personalized learning time” (PLT), a daily ungraded study hall period supervised and occasionally directed by a teacher. The students I worked with had their PLT with Mr. Vaughn, a 9th grade English teacher. Mr. Vaughn was an acquaintance of mine who agreed to let me introduce my study to his PLT students and invite them to participate. He viewed PLT as relatively inconsequential and took a mostly hands-off pedagogical approach, providing a loose structure for what to do each day, but generally not enforcing it, and often letting students simply chat with each other. I only observed Mr. Vaughn during PLT, so I do not know how he taught during his English classes, but he seemed to have a positive rapport with the students, bantering with them during transitions between classes, letting them charge their phones on his power strip or use his microwave, and talking with them about books, movies, and current events.

The PLT period exists as part of the school’s RTI initiative to provide certain groups of students with targeted interventions. Students in Group 2 were considered to be at grade level according to the metrics employed by the school, and students in Group 3, who were assigned to Mr. Vaughn’s class at the beginning of the second semester, were considered to be slightly below grade level in terms of their reading scores, though Mr. Vaughn informed me that he would not do anything differently for the new PLT group. Although there were certain days with mandatory programming in which students were required to be in their PLT class, because it was ungraded and often unstructured, Mr. Vaughn and the school administrators were open to letting students participate in activities, like the discussions of this study, that were peripheral to the

official curriculum during that time. When we met, students participating in the study would leave their PLT classroom and meet with me in the school library for approximately 35 minutes.

To recruit students for both groups, I spent several days in Mr. Vaughn's classroom during PLT, observing and getting to know the 30 or so students there. During this time, I explained the study, asked about topics they might be interested in discussing, and invited them to participate, explaining that, in order to do so, they would need to first get their parents' consent. Most of the students never returned the parental consent forms, generally saying that they forgot, though on one occasion, a student told me that her parents did not want her to participate. The eighteen students across both groups who ultimately took part in the discussion groups were the only ones who returned the parental consent forms and consented themselves. On my first meeting with these consented students, I explained that, even though their parents had given them permission, they did not have to participate in the study, and that at any time they could stay in PLT instead of meeting me in the library. Although some of the consented students did choose to stay with Mr. Vaughn occasionally, and on a few occasions a student came to the library and then decided to return to PLT (or, in at least one case, play hooky), most of the time, the consented students participated throughout the course of the study.

Compared to Group 1, Groups 2 and 3 struggled to sustain extended discussions on their own, and I often had to play a more central role to keep the conversation going, asking questions, providing provocations, and playing the devil's advocate. Groups 2 and 3 also seemed less interested in our metacommunicative activities in general, preferring to just have the discussions rather than talk about them. They were also more politically conservative than Group 1, though most did not have a clear political identity. For example, while none of the students supported the Trump administration, many expressed support for abortion policies that would be

considered pro-life and felt there was a place for traditional gender norms. I share this political information not because I think it had any particular impact on the discussions, but to provide a sense of the various differences among the groups.

Group 2. Group 2 was composed of myself and eight students (see Table 4 below). At one point, Mr. Vaughn offhandedly mentioned to me that the students in Group 2 were good students, though I do not know what criteria he was using to make that evaluation. As noted, they had, apparently, been assessed as being on grade level and they came across as rather mild mannered. In the group, different students seemed to participate in the discussions with varying degrees of comfort and facility. Jabari, Sandy, and Jimena were generally the most vocal participants in our discussions. Amala and Ivan were articulate when they spoke but did not jump in as readily as those three and, when they did, tended to be quite succinct in their remarks. Jared, Yvette, and Rosa were the most reserved of the group, and of the three, Rosa seemed the least comfortable participating verbally. Interestingly, Jared, Yvette, and Rosa also seemed to be the most conservative members of the group, while Sandy and Jimena consistently expressed the most liberal perspectives in the group, though I do not know how they would self-identify politically.

Table 4: Group 2 Composition

GROUP 2		
David*	White	M
Jabari	Black	M
Ivan	White (Ukraine)	M
Sandy	White	F
Jimena	Latinx	F
Amala	Asian American (Vietnam)	F
Jared	Latinx	M
Yvette	Black (Kenya)	F
Rosa	Latinx	F

*Facilitator

Over the course of about a month, I met with Group 2 twelve times. By vote, we chose to discuss abortion, how students ought to be assessed and graded in school, and toxic masculinity (see Table 5 below). In addition to the audio- and video-recordings, I collected the notebooks I had provided students in which they would write responses to prompts I would provide and reflections on our discussions. I also had an exit interview with each student to reflect on their experience with the group (see Appendix B for interview protocol). The interviews were loosely structured and consisted of questions about what participants had learned, how they conceptualized the dialogic ideal, and how they felt they and their classmates had approximated that ideal, including in specific moments I would highlight. In all, I collected approximately 9.5 hours of audio- and/or video-recordings of our time together.

Table 5: Group 2 Calendar

GROUP 2 Meeting Schedule and Focus	
10/24/19	Discussion 1 (Abortion)
10/29/19	Introduction to abortion
10/30/19	Discussion 2 (Abortion)
11/5/19	Metacommunicative reflection
11/6/19	Discussion 3 (Testing/grading)
11/7/19	Discussion 4 (Testing/grading)
11/13/19	Metacommunicative reflection (video analysis)
11/14/19	Choosing discussion topics
11/19/19	Introduction to toxic masculinity
11/20/19	Discussion 5 (Toxic masculinity)
11/21/19	Metacommunicative reflection (video analysis)
11/26/19	Metacommunicative reflection

Of the three groups, Group 2 was the most challenging one for me to facilitate. This was not due to any kind of misbehavior, but because the discussions often felt forced, and the students, though compliant, often seemed somewhat disengaged. I do not know if there was anything in particular that caused this dynamic, or if it was just the random combination of

personalities, opinions, verbal language abilities, etc. It is certainly possible that my facilitation played some role.

Group 3. Group 3 consisted of myself and ten students (see Table 6 below). As noted, these students had all been assessed as being slightly below grade level in terms of their reading scores, but, for whatever reason, the discussions seemed to flow more easily in Group 3 than they did in Group 2. This may have been a function of simply having more students in the group, or it may be related to the characteristics of the specific students in the group. Patience and Aliyah were the most talkative in the group, though Brandin, Luis, Derya, Laura, and Graciella were also regular verbal participants in the discussions; Noemi, Cody, and Adriana were the most reserved. (I consider the case of Noemi in Chapter 4.) Compared to Group 2, Group 3 was relatively boisterous and seemed to enjoy our time together. However, Laura and Adriana sometimes chose to remain in PLT rather than attend our meetings in the library. Perhaps inspired by them, Graciella informed me on one of the days that she would not be joining us in the library, only to arrive slightly late, saying that it was boring in Mr. Vaughn’s room.

Table 6: Group 3 Composition

GROUP 3		
David*	White	M
Patience**	Black	F
Brandin**	Black	M
Luis	Latinx	M
Noemi	Latinx	F
Derya	Kurdish	F
Cody	White	M
Laura	Latinx	F
Adriana	Latinx	F
Aliyah	Black (Sudan)	F
Graciella	Latinx	F

*Facilitator

**Patience and Brandin were siblings.

Over about a month and a half, I met with Group 3 a total of 15 times. We discussed abortion, various issues related to racism and immigration, toxic masculinity, and school discipline. This last topic was inspired by Brandin’s expulsion from the school after getting into a fight during lunch. As with Group 2, I collected both audio- and video-recordings of our meetings and the students’ written reflections. Due to the coronavirus pandemic lockdown, I was unable to conduct exit interviews with these students. In all, I collected approximately 7 hours of audio- and/or video-recordings of our time together.

Table 7: Group 3 Calendar

GROUP 3 Meeting Schedule and Focus	
1/29/20	Metacommunication and introduction to abortion
1/30/20	Discussion 1 (Abortion)
2/4/20	Discussion 2 (Abortion)
2/5/20	Metacommunicative exercise
2/6/20	Discussion 3 (Abortion)
2/11/20	Metacommunicative reflection (video analysis)
2/12/20	Discussion 4 (Racism)
2/13/20	Discussion 5 (Racism)
2/18/20	Metacommunicative reflection
2/19/20	Discussion 6 (Immigration)
2/20/20	Discussion 7 (Immigration)
2/25/20	Metacommunicative exercise
2/26/20	Discussion 8 (Toxic masculinity)
2/27/20	Discussion 9 (Toxic masculinity)
3/10/20	Discussion 10 (School discipline)

Analytical Process

After completing my work with the third group, I began to study the records of our meetings more intensely. I had each discussion transcribed verbatim and I reviewed each transcription with the corresponding video to ensure accuracy. In addition to verifying the

transcription of verbal discourse, I studied students' non-verbal participation (e.g., gaze, gestures, and body language), especially inasmuch as it informed my interpretation of their verbal discourse (e.g., who they were addressing at a given moment). I include some of this non-verbal information in the transcripts below, however, I have not conducted a full-fledged interaction analysis (though I think analyzing data like these with more attention to non-verbal participation and its relation to Dialogue would be very interesting). In addition to focusing on verbal discourse, I have focused primarily on the discussion transcripts, though I also referred to the transcripts of the metacommunicative activities and interviews in order to triangulate my findings and gain further insight.

In this analytical process, the dimensions of Dialogue (answerability, responsiveness, and capacitation) functioned as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954) which helped me attune to the Dialogic qualities of our discussions. Reading the transcript in that light, I identified, categorized, and compiled moments that seemed to manifest some dimension(s) of Dialogue. For instance, I compiled examples of storytelling (see Chapter 4), name-signing (see Chapter 5), and looping for understanding (see Chapter 5)—terms that will be explained subsequently—as well as other categories that do not appear in this dissertation (e.g., moments when I or my co-facilitator articulated an opinion about the topic of discussion). In a recursive process of reading, annotating, and contextualizing these compilations, and in light of my growing sense of Bakhtin's ethico-onto-epistemology, I became increasingly aware of the way the group seemed to function as a dialogic ensemble, affording and constraining each other's participation. Attuned to the ethical qualities of the discussion, I began to ask, How might we understand these moments of ethical import as more than simply examples of good things to do, but as joint accomplishments of the dialogic ensemble and as part of the group's ethico-ontological

development? This line of inquiry led me to notice dynamics such as presencing (see Chapter 4) and genre interference (see Chapter 5).

For example, I was drawn to moments in which interlocutors shared stories about themselves because these moments seemed resonant with answerability. I compiled each instance of this kind of storytelling and read through and annotated the compilation. Initially, I valued these moments in our discussions because of the way speakers seemed to make themselves present to the group, “showing up” in the discourse in a more personal way than usual, and I considered the fact that this storytelling happened at all to be a success in terms of Dialogue. However, as I examined the moments of storytelling in light of Bakhtin’s ethico-ontopistemology and contextualized them in the discussions, I realized that storytelling did not make a speaker fully present, as if their presence in the group was binary, but made them “presence-able” in certain ways. Crucially, how the group responded to the stories profoundly affected the storyteller’s presence in the group. This insight led me to the concept of addressability as a way of understanding processes of presencing, as I explain in Chapter 4.

Relatedly, I initially disregarded the impact of interlocutors’ prior experiences on the way they participate in discussions. Somewhat naively, I assumed that, with some direction and reflection, the participants in the study would develop new priorities and practices in classroom discussions. Implicitly, I imagined that each discussion group was formed *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, carrying none of the baggage and habits of their prior interactions and capable of revising their practice more or less at will. As I facilitated the discussions and examined the transcripts in retrospect, I came to appreciate more fully the pull of the past on our present interactions; I came to see interlocutors as responding not only to their immediate addressees but to those they have addressed previously as well. This complicates both the practice of facilitation

and our ethical considerations, raising questions about the interlocutors to whom we owe certain kinds of responses at a given moment. When I began to view interlocutors as enmeshed in a network of relationships and responses rather than as existing for the moment in a conversation hermetically sealed from the outside world, I had to re-think the meaning and practice of Dialogue. This theoretical understanding also raised questions about analysis. Assuming that my student-interlocutors and research participants were not simply responding to those physically present with them, it seemed problematic to insist that a credible interpretation of data rely exclusively on that which is present in the local transcript. Although I have kept my analysis fairly close to the data, I have also been willing to consider the influence of dynamics that transcend the present interaction (e.g., genres, as discussed in Chapter 5).

As I re-read the preceding paragraphs, I am struck that my analysis can be understood as the process of coming to understand Dialogue and to see the discussions I facilitated in a new way. Analysis, in this sense, was a means of responding to Bakhtin (through his writing) and to the research participants (through the transcripts of the discussions) in a way that I felt did justice to both parties. It was a process of truing my relations with both sets of interlocutors relative to each other. The outcome is not objective truth about classroom discussions, but the possibility of tapping latent potential in them. And this begins with coming to see these interactions in a new light. From this perspective, the “research questions” guiding my analysis were: What is the nature of Dialogue and how might we understand these discussions (and others like them) in terms of Dialogue?

In more personal terms, I wanted to understand what I should do/have done while facilitating discussions, so, for me, my analysis had a normative, evaluative, and emotional quality. I have drawn on Bakhtinian thought because it offers what I consider to be the most

comprehensive and compelling paradigm for asking and answering these questions. As I considered the extent to which I facilitated the discussions well, I found Bakhtin's writings helpful for sensing and conceptualizing the kind of relations I should strive for and how I might cultivate them.

As noted, the process of understanding Bakhtin and understanding/evaluating the discussions I facilitated was not linear. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 4, one of the students in Group 1, Brodie, had a rather circuitous way of speaking during the discussions. Although his manner of speech sometimes irked me, I did not initially understand why it might be less-than-ideal in terms of relational becoming. Reading Bakhtin helped me articulate why that might be, but it also pushed back against some of my simplistic preliminary conclusions. For instance, during one discussion, Brodie repeatedly referred to what a character in a movie says about abortion rather than simply stating what he thought. My initial impression was that this kind of ventriloquation was unanswerable—that Brodie was simply hiding behind the movie character's voice. However, as I continued to read Bakhtin and reflect on other moments in the discussions, I realized that, while ventriloquating others does entail some risk of speaking unanswerably, it also has Dialogic potential. I came to see that, even as he obscured his own position, Brodie disclosed other aspects of himself and introduced the group to a potential interlocutor, inviting us to enter into d/Dialogue with her. This understanding required me not simply to revise my initial analysis, but to consider various ways I might have responded to Brodie more Dialogically—and how I might respond to others like Brodie in the future.

To be clear, my evolving perspective was not simply the result of better understanding Bakhtin (who does not, after all, explicitly discuss the ethical valence of ventriloquation) and applying it to analysis. Instead, as I reflected on the transcripts and identified patterns in the

discourse of the three groups, I began to understand Bakhtin differently and see how his ideas might be brought to bear on the interactions I had observed. The questions of what Bakhtin might mean in relation to these particular interactions (rather than what he meant in general), and what I should do/have done while facilitating discussions were mutually illuminating.

As noted, I think my overall approach is best understood as a form of “thinking with theory” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017), with its interest in putting philosophy to work and opening up “previously unthought approaches to thinking about what is happening in our research sites and encounters” (p. 720) rather than simply applying a preestablished method. Much of what I have done in seeking to understand and explore Bakhtinian Dialogue in relation to the discussions I facilitated seems resonant with the practice Jackson & Mazzei (2017) describe as “co-reading”—“to read theory alongside other texts...[such as] transcripts” (p. 725), to knot these texts together and, in the process, develop “an entire ontological and epistemological orientation” (p. 726).

What my approach may add to “thinking with theory” is an explicitly normative, ethical, evaluative, and emotional component. Postmodernism’s rejection of the grand narratives and certainties of the Enlightenment has made the field suspicious of normative claims in general and specifically those that concern the Good. Following Bakhtin, I believe that relativism is just as deadening as dogmatism, and I have attempted to avoid both monologic extremes, embracing an explicitly normative vision of the Dialogic relationships that ought to be cultivated in classroom discussions while also acknowledging the many ambiguities inherent in pursuing Dialogue. In other words, I unapologetically take Dialogue to be good, but I admit that it may be impossible to know to what extent it has been achieved or approximated in any given moment. Having a normative vision of Dialogue makes understanding and evaluating these often-ambiguous

moments all the more interesting and urgent. Without first sensing the direction we ought to go, there is little sense in having a lively, evaluative discussion about the steps along the way. I have taken this path not simply out of an intellectual commitment, but because ethically weighty questions gnaw at me. As I facilitated discussions about a controversial topic and afterwards, I repeatedly asked myself if I had done the right thing in responding a certain way. I felt these questions in my gut, sensing the potential harm I might inflict with a bad response or the good I might do by responding tactfully. I have embraced these ethical and emotional questions, thinking-feeling my way toward preliminary answers—and further questions.

Limitations

Given my interest in cultivating Dialogue, I can anticipate one objection relative to my retrospective analysis, namely that, in privileging my perspective as it does, it is itself non-Dialogic. While I understand why this monocular analysis may seem unfitting for a study that takes Dialogue as its object and aim, but I do not think that this is the case. I admit that the analysis that follows is not the product of any in-the-moment collaboration with the other participants. I did not, for example, ask them to weigh in with their own analyses and interpretations; the majority of what follows comes from my own post hoc analysis. I do not believe this approach makes the analysis non-Dialogic, though it is operating at a different scale of time/space than our in-the-moment relationships. The ability to step back and reconsider our discussions from a different point in time/space has allowed me to respond to my past interlocutors in a way that was not possible at the time, and, while these participants are unlikely to read this dissertation and respond to it, I anticipate future responses from others.

Another limitation is the relatively short amount time I had with each group. Although I admit that more extended observations of the students would likely be fruitful, I have tried to

keep my claims as close to the text as possible. In other words, I do not make claims about what the participants were thinking or what kind of persons they are; rather, I simply examine what we did in our time together. Because of the conceptual and exploratory focus of this research, I believe the limited data collection is justifiable. I note as well that it seems significant that, despite the relatively short amount of time I had with each group and the notable differences between them (especially between Group 1 and Groups 2-3), patterns emerged across the groups. The fact that such similarities exist suggests that there are likely similar patterns in other groups as well, though, of course, that should be empirically examined.

I am also aware that some readers will find this research impractical for the work of classroom teaching. This is not simply because of the conceptual focus of my research but because the discussions I analyze did not take place within the context of any particular discipline or curriculum. This limits the immediate relevance of my findings with regards to implementation in the classroom, but that is ultimately because I do not assume that classroom practice is already sufficiently ethical as to be simply taken for granted. If Dialogue is impractical for classroom practice, it may be that classroom practice ought to evolve rather than vice-versa.

More generally, I want to reiterate that I hope this dissertation will be viewed as an utterance in an ongoing conversation and not the final word. In a positivistic research paradigm, taking such a stand is tantamount to admitting to any number of limitations, but in my Bakhtin-inspired worldview, it is the only sensible stance. Though I have sought to read both theory and data carefully, I know that I am limited by my own perspective and can only be liberated as others respond from a different point in time/space. I hope that what follows will be deemed worthy of such a response.

Chapter 4: Presencing Selves in Dialogue

As noted, the broad purpose of this dissertation is to approach the question of classroom dialogue not primarily in terms of what students learned (i.e., epistemology), but in terms of interlocutors' relational becoming (i.e., ethics and ontology). To that end, in this chapter, I introduce and draw on the lenses of addressability and presencing as one way to see and analyze the relational becoming of group members during moments of discussion. In Part 1, I focus on how, even while participating in the discussion, students sometimes fail to "show up" to their interlocutors in their comments, concealing or obscuring where they stand relative to the topic at hand. In terms of Dialogue, this is problematic because, by thus removing themselves from the conversation, interlocutors limit the kinds of self-Other relationships that are possible in the group. I also consider how this kind of arguably unanswerable discourse emerges dialogically and is not, therefore, the sole responsibility of any single interlocutor, but is distributed across the group. In Part 2, I discuss several moments when, seemingly in contrast to the discourse discussed in Part 1, students shared self-stories with the group. These stories were significant in relation to the goal of Dialogue because they were moments of self-disclosure that invited interlocutors to respond to the storyteller and narrativized Others in some new way, moments with significant potential in terms of relational becoming. In that light, I also consider how the group responded to students' self-stories, often, it seems, not realizing their potential.

Analytical Lenses: Addressability and Presencing

Inspired by Bakhtin, I see an interlocutor's presence in any social situation not as a given, but as something authored and dynamic. Whenever we speak, we make certain aspects of our thinking, personality, identity, and/or history salient and available to others for address; we make ourselves addressable in certain ways. How interlocutors render themselves addressable and how

they respond to others—how they address that which speakers make addressable—determines who they become together. By making oneself addressable and/or by being addressed in certain ways, interlocutors become present in the group, or, at the very least, they potentialize that becoming, rendering themselves presence-able in certain ways that may not have been readily available previously. In other words, we are dialogically “presenced” through how we make ourselves addressable and how we are addressed.

The terms I use related to addressability and presencing refer to the same process and have much overlap. Making oneself addressable in a certain way is a kind of presencing (i.e., becoming present to others as being addressable), and being presenced in dialogue with others can be understood as a process of becoming addressable in a certain way (i.e., affirmatively or negatively responding to a certain kind of address). As interlocutors respond to each other, they are presenced and become addressable in certain ways with the group. I draw on these lenses in order to attend to the ways that discussions are sites of relational becoming and not merely idea development. Any moment of interaction is constituted by selves-in-dialogue who are becoming certain kinds of people (both individually and collectively), presenced and addressable in certain ways, for better or for worse. In the following examples, I draw on this lens to analyze how, at a micro level, students were made addressable, subsequently addressed, and presenced in our discussions.

Presencing Noemi as Shy

In this section, I consider the case of Noemi, a reticent participant in Group 3. In one of her journal entries, Noemi said that, while she would like to speak up more often, she was “too shy” (2/26/20). I do not know how or to what extent Noemi’s shyness manifested in other contexts, so I can only refer to what happened in our time together. She voluntarily participated

in the study and attended the discussions, even when some of her peers did not, but never spoke unless explicitly invited to do so and, as will be discussed below, sometimes seemed to mute or mask her unique voice and perspective. Noemi exemplifies one way in which interlocutors fail to “show up” in dialogue, and I suspect that understanding her case will attune readers to their own interlocutors in new ways. I will also suggest that this failure to “show up” is dialogically authored rather than Noemi’s fault, though I retain that she is somewhat responsible.

Example 1

In Group 3, we typically began our meetings with a 5-10 minute get-to-know-you activity of some kind, as part of my efforts to cultivate an environment in which we could relate to each other as unique individuals. For our first meeting (1/29/2020), I simply asked the students to share a movie, TV show, or book that they liked. I introduced this prompt and suggested that I would share first and then we would proceed clockwise around the room. Noemi, who sat to my left, would be the first student to share. After I informed the class that I liked *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, I gestured toward Noemi and the following exchange took place:

Transcript 1		
David	Noemi.	1
Noemi	I don’t have a favorite movie.	2
David	‘Kay. You don’t have to. What’s a book or a movie or a TV show that you like?	3
Noemi	[Pause] I don’t really have a favorite TV show and I don’t like books.	4
David	‘kay, ‘kay. So Noemi doesn’t like, TV. Do you like movies? It doesn’t have to be your favorite. Is there a movie you’ve liked?	5 6
Noemi	[Looks down]	7
David	Not really? It’s okay. [Points to Laura.]	8

Noemi’s initial response, “I don’t have a favorite movie” (line 2), her first comment in the group, only references one of the three mediums I mentioned and exaggerates the prompt. My response (lines 3-4) seeks to expand her narrowed sense of the question, assuring her that she does not need a *favorite* movie—that she can simply share a book, movie, or TV show she *likes*. After a pause, she refers to the two mediums she neglected in her initial comment. Although she

seems more emphatic about books than TV shows (“I don’t like books” vs. “I don’t really have a favorite TV show,” 1.5), I say, “So Noemi doesn’t like, TV” (line 6), closing off possibilities of discussing that medium, and return to movies. My sense seems to be that she is hesitant to identify her favorite, so I assure her again that she does not need to do so and ask, “Is there a movie you’ve liked?” Interpreting her body language as a bid to be excused, I answer the question for her (“Not really?”) and assure her that “It’s okay” (line 8).

I wondered if Noemi was simply embarrassed to be the first student to share something personal with the group, so after each of the other group members had shared, I gave her one more chance to answer the prompt like her peers:

Transcript 1 cont.		
David	Noemi, did you think of any movies or books you like?	9
Noemi	[<i>Shakes head</i>]	10
David	Okay, that’s fine. You never had to- you never have to say if you don’t want to.	11 12

Echoing my earlier closure (line 6), the invitation to share does not mention TV shows (line 9), the medium in relation to which she actually expressed the most openness. She wordlessly declines the invitation and I excuse her, reminding her and the group members that they are never obligated to participate.

In this get-to-know-you activity, Noemi only explicitly makes herself addressable in negative terms, as someone who does not have a favorite movie (line 2), does not really have a favorite TV show (line 5), does not like books (line 5), and has not thought of any movies or books she likes (line 10). There are many possible explanations for why she might make herself (not) addressable in the way she did (e.g., perhaps she is not allowed to watch TV or movies at home and has dyslexia), but because all the other students had ready and affirmative answers, I simply assumed that she was shy. For me, at least, and I assume for the other members of the

group, Noemi’s negative responses and avoidance of what we might term “positive addressability” presenced her as shy. Although it is certainly true that Noemi’s behavior is consistent with my concept of shyness—and, indeed, as noted, Noemi later self-identified as shy—her presence in the group as a shy person was at least partly co-authored by me. Consider, for example, how I do not always address her in the ways she makes herself addressable. In particular, my second response (line 6) labels her as someone who does not like TV, marking her as addressable in a way that she never claimed, and my second invitation addresses her as someone who may like books, an address she explicitly denied (line 5). There is no knowing what may have happened if I had attended and responded more carefully to her particular addressability, but in the flow of activity and pressures of the moment, I participated in presencing her in the group as a shy person.

Example 2

Several days after that initial meeting (2/6/2020), during Group 3’s final discussion about abortion, I invited the group members to take part in an activity that was deliberately designed to help them take a stand. I gave each person a hypothetical scenario printed on a sticky note and asked them to place their sticky note on the table along a spectrum between “Okay” and “Not Okay” (with regards to the justifiability of abortion) and to explain that placement. After Graciella, Luis, and Aliyah had done this, with some discussion following their explanations, I had another exchange with Noemi that feels similar in many ways to the previous example:

Transcript 2		
David	Okay, Noemi, you wanna go?	1
Noemi	Mine says, there’s a risk the mother will be harmed in the process of the pregnancy, but I don’t know, where to put it because [<i>Pause</i>]	2 3
David	What do you think?	4
Noemi	Because, I don’t know to be honest.	5
David	Mm-hmm. So if the mom could be harmed by getting pregnant. Do you think it’s, it would be okay to get an abortion or not?	6 7

Noemi	I'm kind of like in, between no, in between yes and no [<i>Extends arm</i> ¹].	8
David	Go ahead and put it right in the middle. [<i>David taps in the middle and Noemi places the card near where he taps</i> ²] Why do you put it there?	9 10
Noemi	Because, [<i>Makes eye contact with Derya</i>] I honestly don't know. [<i>Derya laughs</i>]	11 12
David	Okay. Who wants to go next?	13
Derya	I'll go.	14

¹See Figure 3 below. ²See Figure 4 below.

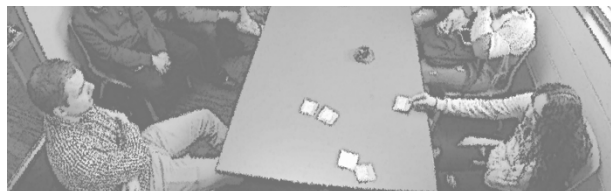


Figure 3: Noemi Gesture 1



Figure 4: Noemi Gesture 2

In this episode, Noemi once again makes herself addressable mostly in negative terms, as someone who does not know (see lines 2, 4, and 10). My initial responses implicitly acknowledge this but attempt to address her as someone who does have some thoughts on the topic (lines 3, 5-6). After this second response, rather than claiming ignorance again, Noemi assumes what I call a “pseudo-stance,” saying “I’m kind of...in between yes and no” (line 7). A pseudo-stance is a way to nominally take a stand without really having to stand for anything. Unlike an outright refusal to participate, it goes through the motions of engaging with the discussion (and making oneself positively addressable), perhaps in an attempt to appease the teacher, but it is vague and/or relativistic enough that it makes meaningful engagement with the Other and their ideas difficult or pointless⁴. Noemi was not unique among group members for articulating a pseudo-stance. For example, in different discussions, Luis said, “I’m in the middle, ‘cause sometimes it’s good and sometimes it’s bad;” Jane said, “I just see a paradox. It’s just confusing;” Jabari said, “It just depends on the situation;” and Brodie said, “I just find that interesting.” In each of these examples, as in Noemi’s, the speakers maintain a sort of plausible

⁴ I assume this is why Bakhtin (1984) considered relativism to be just as monologic as dogmatism (see p. 69).

deniability regarding their opinion, never nailing down where exactly they stand⁵. While it may be that arriving at a pseudo-stance is developmentally significant, as it disrupts the facile distinctions that pervade many of the issues we discussed, including the pro-choice/pro-life binary, it can also constrain dialogue. Many people do believe, in fact, that abortion should be accessible and permissible in some situations and not others, finding themselves, like Noemi, “in between yes and no.” But that stance alone without additional specificity generally discourages further engagement both because it is unclear where the speakers stand (which makes it hard to address them) and because many responses could be brushed off or assented to with the same pseudo-stance (which makes it easy to let others’ opinions go unquestioned and undisputed).

But Noemi had, perhaps, provided some sense of where along the spectrum she was inclined to place her sticky note, extending her arm directly in front of her, in line with two of the three sticky notes that had already been placed (see Figure 3). Attending to her words more than that gesture, I instruct her to place it “right in the middle” (line 8), indicating a location on the table more central than where she was reaching (see Figure 4). Hoping that my insistence will help her participate more fully in the activity and reveal her thinking to the group, I then ask her why she thinks the card belongs there, once again encouraging her to take a stand of some kind (lines 8-9). She seems to consider explaining, saying “Because,” but quickly claims ignorance again and emphasizes her sincerity, saying, “I honestly don’t know” (line 10). Unsure of what to make of her interaction with Derya, I accept her bid to be excused from the activity and ask, “Who wants to go next?” (line 12), and Derya volunteers.

⁵ Using the other meaning of “address” (i.e., the particular location of a building), we might say that a pseudo-stance makes you addressable, but without sharing your actual address, something like asking someone to send a letter to Colorado.

I will argue that, once again, Noemi is presented in the group as a shy person and that this presence was dialogically authored. Noemi had a hand in this, not taking an affirmative stand and making herself more directly addressable, but it was as we responded to her, and she to us, that this presencing took place. Throughout the episode, Noemi repeatedly makes herself addressable as someone who does not know where to put the sticky note (lines 2, 4, and 10). She responds to my question, “What do you think?” (line 3), as if I were asking, “Where do you think it should go?” rather than “What factors are you considering?” When I explicitly ask her something other than where it should go (lines 5-6), addressing her not as a sticky-note-placer, but as someone with ideas about the justifiability of abortion in the case of possible harm to the mother, she makes herself positively, though vaguely, addressable as being “in between yes and no” (line 7), extending her arm toward two of the sticky notes that had already been placed on the table (see Figure 3). My response, which does not acknowledge her gesture, assumes that the significance of the table spectrum is transparent to Noemi and addresses her once again as a sticky-note-placer, suggesting that she should place her sticky note in the middle. She does so, and I immediately ask why she put it there (line 9). One obvious answer is that I told her to put it there, but Noemi simply says, once again, that she does not know. While responding to me, she also indicates something to Derya (lines 10-11), who volunteers to go next (line 13), removing the spotlight from Noemi.

My responses to Noemi assume that all she needs are some additional opportunities and teacherly encouragement to take a stand—that she has something to say but is simply shy about sharing it. In other words, I relate to her as a shy person and reify that identity in the process. Of course, this does not absolve Noemi of all responsibility. To the extent that her claims of ignorance and ambivalence do not actually reflect her thinking, they are not answerable in the

technical sense that they mute or mask her unique voice and perspective. There is certainly more she could have done to explain herself and make herself more clearly addressable, but it is also true that our responses to her did not afford her these responses to us.

Example 3

This final example of dialogically presencing Noemi as shy comes from our discussion on 2/13/20 about racism. In the course of this discussion, several students, including Noemi, indicated that their parents had immigrated to the United States, and I had invited them to share their stories with the group, if they would like. After each of the other students did so, the following exchange took place:

Transcript 3		
David	Noemi, do you want to share?	1
Noemi	It's a long story but like, I don't know like the full story because like usually I never like, listen to my, [David: Mm-hmm] my mom say it, [David: Mm-hmm] but like when she tells my other siblings.	2
		3
		4
David	Do you want to share anything you do know or? You don't have to.	5
Noemi	I, I don't know the full story, so.	6
David	Okay.	7

Once again, we can understand this interaction in terms of how interlocutors are rendered addressable and addressed. I begin by addressing Noemi as possibly wanting to share her family's story (line 1). In her response, she sidesteps this address and instead makes herself addressable as not knowing the full story (line 2), as generally not listening to her mother's storytelling (lines 2-3), and as having siblings who do listen (line 4). Although I conceivably could have responded by addressing her in any of these ways (e.g., So your mom tells the story to your siblings?), I mostly repeat my initial address, asking once again if she wants to share the part(s) of the story she knows, and reiterate that she does not have to do so (line 5). Again, she sidesteps this address and makes herself addressable as not knowing the full story (line 6), which I interpret and accept as a bid to be excused from comment (line 7), further presencing Noemi as

a shy person. As with the previous examples, this presencing is dialogically authored, as the ways in which she makes herself addressable and I address her often do not align. This is not to say that, had I addressed her otherwise, she necessarily would have responded differently, but a different address may have opened up other possibilities of ethico-onto-epistemological becoming in relation to Noemi.

Reviewing Noemi's Presence

One explanation for this pattern of interaction is simply that Noemi is shy—that her shyness pre-exists our discussion group and causes these responses. While it is certainly possible, even likely, that Noemi has developed habits of responding in a way that is understandable in terms of shyness, it is also true that her presence in the group as a shy person is dialogically co-authored. This presencing is consequential in terms of who Noemi becomes in the group and, relatedly, who the group becomes together⁶. Because of the ways she makes herself addressable and is addressed (and the misalignments between the two), we repeatedly encounter her mostly as someone who is shy—at most a single dimension of her multidimensional self—and do not benefit from her unique voice and outside perspective. This is a failure of the dialogic ensemble and not of any single interlocutor, though, as I have suggested above, there are certainly ways in which I might have attended more carefully and openly to Noemi, perhaps affording her different kinds of responses.

To be clear, I do not think that the ways Noemi engaged in the discussions differently than I expected and wanted are inherently bad. In fact, I think it is important that students can

⁶ These observations seem in line with Wortham's (2008) discussion of the "objectification of identity," in which he analyzes how durable identities emerge over time across multiple interactions. What my analysis adds is an explicitly ethical framework for understanding and evaluating these interactions. This framework also attunes us to ways in which interactions that are less obviously problematic than those Wortham (2008) discusses might still be ethically suboptimal.

choose not to participate in a given activity, but this does not mean that all disengagements are equally justifiable. In brief, I consider disengagements to be justifiable, even answerable, inasmuch as they presence the refuser to the group as the particular person they are. For example, although I may have bristled initially, from a Dialogic perspective, I would be more satisfied if Noemi, rather than appealing to a vague ignorance/ambivalence, had said, “I don’t understand what I’m supposed to do,” “I think this is a dumb activity so I’m not going to do it,” or “This is a sensitive topic for me and I’d rather not discuss it now.” In each of these examples, while the procedural outcome might be similar (i.e., she would be assisted or excused from the activity), Noemi would make herself more clearly addressable to the group in relation to something more than her supposed ignorance/ambivalence. I recognize that some of these responses might seem insubordinate to some readers. Note, however, that a student can only be considered insubordinate in the conventional sense if they are first viewed as subordinate to the teacher. Although it is impossible to entirely remove all power dynamics from a given interaction, dialogue requires that interlocutors be viewed as “insubordinate” in the etymological sense of not being of a lower order or, put otherwise, unworthy of certain forms of address and response.

Presencing Brodie Ambiguously

In this section, I consider the case of Brodie, a participant in Group 1’s discussions and a remarkable counterpoint a Noemi. From a conventional perspective of classroom dialogue, Brodie and Noemi would be viewed as polar opposites in terms of how they participated in their respective groups: Brodie was the most outspoken liberal in the group and often the person who spoke the most in our discussions, both because he had strong opinions and because he tended to be rather verbose in articulating them. He was aware of this tendency and attributed it to his upbringing in a conservative state where he often found himself in situations in which he was the

only liberal and had to defend progressive politics single-handedly. Despite their obvious differences, however, when viewed through the lens of presencing/addressability, they have interesting similarities: Brodie and Noemi both tended to not “show up” in dialogue, though in rather different ways. Brodie thus exemplifies another set of ways in which interlocutors may fail to make themselves/be rendered addressable in answerable ways. As with Noemi’s case, I believe that understanding how Brodie was (not) presented in our discussions, readers will be able to attune and respond to their interlocutors in different and, perhaps, more Dialogic ways.

Would You Sign Your Name to That?

For the purposes of this chapter, I will limit my analysis to a single extended exchange which took place during Group 1’s discussion about abortion. The transcript included below begins as Brodie responds to a brief discussion among other students about the comparability of a fetus to a non-human animal, indicating that he largely agreed that a fetus need not be considered human. This exchange represents a typical chunk of Group 1’s discussions and of Brodie’s verbal discourse.

Transcript 4		
Brodie	I do kind of- I'm interested by this notion that the humanistic quality of life, like often people disassociate humans as like a species, or like an animalistic species, but like the humanistic quality of life, I don't- I would agree. I don't think it's found as a fetus. I think there is something about a shared human experience that gives you a sense of humanistic life, and I- I don't know if I would've went so far to like name examples, but I agree with the theory, I guess. I guess, um something else that I've heard raised a lot recently, people often when they talk about abortions will say that they're worried the baby or fetus will suffer. A baby will suffer if born. Something else that I've heard raised recently is people having a very philosophical and ethical debate is, what world am I bringing a child into? Not that the child might necessarily suffer when it gets here from like anything physical or biologically wrong with it, but um, this id- this notion that maybe you're bringing into a child, a child into a world that is not fit for it to be prosperous or live a healthy, good life, whatever standards you want to set to it. This notion that just because a child is born, does not, or a baby is born, it is not instantaneously guaranteed the same equal human experience that every other baby is. So maybe there has to be this ethical question of what life am I bringing a person into? And I think that's just something that, it's been very recently talked about. But I don't	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

	think that most people are acknowledging like there are different qualities of life that may impact this decision.	18 19
Liam	Would you- would you sign your name to that? (<i>Laughter from group</i>)	20
Brodie	I personally believe, yeah. At some point you have to consider it's inethical for you to think, I can have a child, we'll figure it out after it happens. Like we'll figure out if this was a life that this child deserved or if this is the life that any human deserved, like I don't think, I feel like that's very inethical as a parent, which would be like, oh, okay, well let me accidentally get pregnant, whatever the situation may be, and then have a child. I feel like that's an inethical situation to bring them into like a very, if there are situations that it's not fit for a person to live in, including yourself. If you feel like you're in a situation that's unfit for <u>you</u> , to bring another person into that situation seems very inethical and irresponsible.	21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29
Liam	Right.	30
Ted	You gotta ()	31
Anand	Can I ask a question?	32
Brodie	Please	33
Anand	So, what you were saying- So, um, so like how would you view it if, let's say, someone who's born in a rich family and had a teen pregnancy and they were at high school, or whatever, and they decided to get an abortion. Compared to someone who was like, in a actually a very difficult situation, where they could not raise the baby in a healthy environment. Would you see- would it- would one be more okay than the other?	34 35 36 37 38
Brodie	I'm very pro choice, I think either's fine.	39
Anand	So okay, so-	40
Brodie	but I, but I think that is something that a lot of, um, a lot of people and, very, including myself, there's a actually a film that raises this notion to me, it was called, it was called A Private Life. It's about a couple that's trying to have a baby and they have to do it, not like naturally, I do not, it's like a sperm don-, they get a sperm donor. But um, while she's like filling out the papers, she goes to this kind of like a meta-level philosophical like struggle with like, What am I doing to this child? Like they're coming into a world that is not in a good place right now. And then she goes off on this <u>tangent</u> about all the issues in the world that she's bringing a child into. And until I saw that, I was like, wow, I never thought of it like that. I always thought of it much like you all are thinking, or most people think about it as like, Am I bringing a child into a place where they are going to suffer physically or for whatever biological reason, where it's like, at some point there's like a moral question of like suffering too.	41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52
David	So when you talk about the world, you're not talking about the- like the family's socioeconomic status.	53 54
Brodie	I think- I think you can go to both. I think there are situations where it's just the socioeconomic status and other situations you look at- in the tangent, she's like, what am	55 56

	I bringing it out into? And then she goes off, she's like climate change and war and famine and disease and all the, and she just goes off on a <u>tangent</u> about everything that's wrong with the world, and while I didn't necessarily agree with all of that, I still found it interesting that like this is something that is interesting to think about, and like a lot of countries are sharing like a very similar like philosophy of like how like aside kind of but like they're saying some similar philosophy, like they want a negative population growth because they're so overpopulated and that terrifies them as like a government, that they're encouraging, like very heavily, like negative population growth. Like a lot of western European countries, and like China is like very crazy about how spec- like, like crazy's the wrong word, but very, very restrictive on their population growth. But like it is something that like, is not like an Americanized concept yet, which I just find interesting.	57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68
Liam	Um, so there, so it's either the, so there are two two like kind of points here as I see it. It's one of them is the um, like the world we live in due to like stuff like climate change and stuff is becoming so horrible that potentially every child might not like have a good life. And the other one is depending on your situation, your child might- depending on your socioeconomic or whatever situation, that your child might not have a good life. Those- so those are the two possible like arguments.	69 70 71 72 73 74
Brodie	I don't know if it's limited to just those two. I just, I thought that question that was raised was very interesting and I was just, it, what I won't sign my name to is that I agree that that's a probable cause for an abortion. I'm very pro-choice for the first two trimesters. I don't feel like you need a reason that you don't want to have a child don't have a child. Uh third trimester, I think it has to come down to viability or if it's going to harm or kill the mother. But I don't know if I'm uh willing to sign my name to, oh I wouldn't have a child right now because of climate change, but I do mean that it's something that people have to start asking, is like, what is, what is the environment they're coming into?	75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82
Liam	So you're, you're just stating this argument, but you don't necessarily even believe in its validity.	83 84
Brodie	I don't agree with every facet of the argument. I agree with raising the questions.	85
David	You would say, it <u>could</u> be the ethical choice to choose to abort a baby given world conditions. [Brodie : Yeah] That that is a defensible argument.	86 87
Brodie	I think- Yeah. I think it's defensible and it- and to say, but yeah, I can't, I don't agree with every facet, but I would, I wouldn't judge someone who made that argument and that was their defense for having an abortion.	88 89 90
Liam	You wouldn't judge <u>anybody</u> for having an abortion.	91
Brodie	Uh, if a mother was, we used, what was it, 40 weeks if it was 39th week and that the fetus was in every scientifically provable way viable outside of the womb, had an abortion. I don't know if I could see a moral reason for that.	92 93 94
Liam	Okay, gotcha.	95

After responding to an idea brought up by his classmates, Brodie maintains the floor and pivots to “something else that I’ve heard raised a lot recently” (lines 6-7). He goes on to introduce two different ways people talk about abortion, one having to do with suffering (lines 7-8), the other having to do with quality of life (lines 8-13). Though the distinction between the two orientations is not entirely clear, he seems to align with the latter perspective, but does so obliquely. In Goffman's (1974) terms, he acts as the “animator” of other speakers rather than revealing himself as the “principal” and/or “author” of these ideas, a documented means of achieving discursive neutrality (Clayman, 1992). Although this is likely more habitual than deliberate, he does a lot of discursive work to obscure where exactly he stands relative to the ideas he introduces. In this initial turn, the closest he gets to self-revelation, to making himself addressable as having a particular opinion, is when he says, “So maybe there has to be this ethical question of what life am I bringing a person into?” (line 16). Immediately afterwards, however, he creates some distance between himself and that question, saying, “And I think that’s just something that, it’s been very recently talked about” (lines 17). With this comment, he makes himself addressable as someone who has heard this idea but not necessarily as the bearer of that opinion—as a hearer, not a believer. If his opinion is that the quality of life a newborn would inherit is a legitimate criterion when considering abortion, he discursively inserts other people between himself and that idea, saying “I don’t think that most people are acknowledging like there are different qualities of life that may impact this decision” (lines 17-19), as represented in Table 8 below. In terms of what Brodie makes explicit, he becomes addressable only as someone who has heard other people talking about abortion and who has some “meta” understanding of how they are (not) discussing it.

Table 8: Obscuring One's Addressability

Brodie	Other People	Opinion
I don't think that	most people are acknowledging like	there are different qualities of life that may impact this decision

Although there are contexts in which this kind of opinion is revealing, risky, and answerable, in this discussion, it seems to be mostly self-protective, perhaps because Brodie is simply exploring these ideas, or perhaps because he is wary of the consequences of taking a hard and potentially controversial stand. Liam calls Brodie out, asking, “would you sign your name to that?” (line 20), a remark that invokes a Bakhtinian concept we introduced to the class and seems intended to prod Brodie to put himself on the line, to make himself directly addressable in relation to these ideas. (I consider the concept/practice of name-signing more fully in Chapter 5.) The laughter this question elicits may suggest that other students also sense how Brodie’s comments obscure his addressability. In lines 21-29, Brodie responds, speaking more directly as himself and explaining that he considers it unethical to bring a child into a situation that is unfit for human life, leaving open, however, the question of what qualities make a given situation more or less “fit.”

Anand picks this up and asks if Brodie sees two different scenarios differently—if abortion would be “more okay” in one (line 38)—implicitly searching for the criteria Brodie has in mind. Brodie responds by identifying as “pro-choice” and saying that “either’s fine” (line 39). Anand seems poised to further examine Brodie’s stance when Brodie continues. Echoing some of his earlier animation of other voices, he begins by referring to “something that...a lot of people” (line 41) presumably are saying; he adds himself to the group (“including myself” line 34) but then, rather than directly sharing what he thinks, defers to the film *A Private Life*, ventriloquating its protagonist as she considers using a sperm donor to become pregnant. At line 42, the comment becomes autobiographical, as Brodie narrates how the movie changed his

perspective. He explains, “I always thought of it much like you all are thinking, or as most people think about it” (lines 49-50). I take the revision from “you all” to “most people” to indicate a recognition that it might not be appropriate to label the entire group as having a certain opinion; in either case, however, Brodie seems to address a seemingly homogenous group of people and not any person(s) in particular. Apparently, in Brodie’s mind, the perspective held by most people, including his most proximate interlocutors, has to do with physical suffering or biological concerns, whereas his new perspective concerns the “moral question of...suffering” (line 52).

Still seeking clarity, I ask another follow up question. As he begins answering, he seems to approach his own opinion, saying, “I think there are situations where it’s just the socioeconomic status and other situations you look at” (lines 55-56), when he breaks off and once again begins to ventriloquate the film’s protagonist (lines 56-59). Done referencing the movie, Brodie initially hedges, saying, “I didn’t necessarily agree with all of that” (line 59) and then takes a kind of pseudo-stance: “this is something that is interesting to think about” (line 60). After referring to “a lot of countries” who have a similar philosophy (lines 60-67), he concludes, saying, “which I just find interesting” (lines 67-68). Brodie’s repeated ventriloquations and ambiguous pseudo-stances make it hard to identify where exactly he stands in all this; he makes himself addressable to the group as someone with interest in and familiarity with ethical questions about abortion, extant conversations, and certain national policies, but not really as a unique individual with a particular opinion on the matter.

Liam in particular seems frustrated with Brodie’s obscure addressability. In lines 69-74, he offers two possible arguments having to do with “a good life,” implicitly asking Brodie to identify which one he is talking about. Brodie resists the binary choice, saying “I don’t know if

it's limited to just those two" (line 75), and reiterates his pseudo-stance: "I thought that question that was raised was very interesting" (lines 75-76). Echoing the terminology of signing one's name which Liam used in his first question (line 20), Brodie then says that he does not necessarily agree that "that's a probable cause for an abortion" (line 77). I take this to mean that he does not necessarily believe that the possibility that a child will inherit a bad life should preclude someone from giving birth. As he explains this, he notes that he is "very pro-choice for the first two trimesters" (line 77) and does not think that someone needs any particular reason to abort a pregnancy within that time frame (lines 77-78). In the third trimester, however, he believes that abortion should be limited to cases related to fetal viability and the health of the mother. Concluding this turn at talk, Brodie returns once again to the name-signing metaphor, saying that while he would not necessarily approve of someone choosing not to have a child because of climate change, he thinks that people have to start considering the environment their children will inherit. It may be that Brodie's position is that, during the first two trimesters, people can choose to have an abortion for any reason they see fit, and the likelihood of their child inheriting a good life is a valid reason—one that prospective parents should take into consideration; but Brodie does not explicitly connect his pro-choice stance during the first two trimesters with his other musings, and he only indirectly states his opinion in terms of what he will not sign his name to.

Once again, in lines 83-84, Liam pushes for Brodie to make himself more directly addressable in relation to the ideas he is raising. This opens a series of questions in which Liam and I, speaking in the second person, characterize Brodie's opinion for him: "You're just stating..." (line 83), "You would say..." (line 86), and "You wouldn't judge..." (line 91). Perhaps tired of Brodie's repeated obscurations, we speak for him, providing him words that he

can either accept or reject. He responds, repeating that, while he does not agree with every facet of the argument, he thinks people should be raising these questions (about the quality of life a child will inherit) and that such considerations could provide a legitimate reason to get an abortion. When pressed, he ultimately says, “I don’t know if I could see a moral reason for” aborting a pregnancy of a viable child at the 39th week (line 94). Although, as I read it, there remain several loose ends in this exchange, Brodie’s answer seems to satisfy Liam, his most insistent questioner, and the conversation moves on.

Reviewing Brodie’s Presence

One way to read this episode—which, in fact, reflects my original orientation to Brodie’s mode of participating in our discussions—is to blame Brodie for his loquacious and circumlocutory discourse. However, from a d/Dialogic perspective, his utterances must be viewed as a joint accomplishment and not simply as Brodie’s fault. This is because, first, Brodie’s previous and imagined interlocutors play some role in shaping how he tends to speak, not simply because of habits he has developed, but because, in many ways, he continues to respond to them (rather, it sometimes seems, than those he is physically present with) and, second, the other members of the group (myself included) were complicit to some degree in Brodie’s utterances. In making ourselves addressable, asking questions, listening, and, most obviously, facilitating the discussion in certain ways over time, we allowed for and partly authored certain responses.

Consider, for example, how all of the follow-up questions and assertions seek to render Brodie addressable in terms of his opinion while not actually offering any particular addressability themselves. Though they invite a certain response, the questioner is not made explicitly present in the asking. When Liam tries to clarify Brodie’s point by outlining, as he sees

it, the two possible arguments Brodie might be making (lines 69-74), Brodie's response, "I don't know if it's limited to just those two. I just, I thought that question that was raised was very interesting" (lines 75-76) might be understood as an attempt to side-step a potential trap. Unsure of what Liam thinks, which of the options he and other group members might be more sympathetic to, and how they might respond, Brodie plays it safe with a pseudo-stance.

Although, in terms of amount spoken in our discussions, Brodie was the opposite of Noemi, like her, he struggled (in dialogue with the rest of the group) to become addressable and presenced in the group as an individual with a unique voice and perspective. Despite his many comments, the group often did not really encounter Brodie himself; instead, we encountered Brodie the ventriloquist as he gave voice to a variety of different people. This affected the quality of our relational becoming in part because it was unclear who we were responding to and how we might address Brodie.

Part 2: Storytelling and Story-responding

The examples discussed in Part 1 represent the kind of discourse that was typical in our discussions, taking place predominantly on the plane of ideas, with students articulating certain perspectives, raising questions, and the like—the kind of thing one tends to think of when imagining a discussion. When Groups 1 and 3 were discussing abortion, for example, most of the time, we talked about abstractions such as a woman's right to control her own body and a fetus' right to life, and where students stood on these issues. As I have suggested above, this discourse entails a kind of self-revelation (or obscuration) in which interlocutors are rendered addressable and are presenced as having certain beliefs, opinions, and reasons. However, there were other moments in our discussions in which students "showed up" much more directly, moments that I will refer to as instances of storytelling. For the purposes of this chapter, I define storytelling

broadly as any implicit or explicit disclosure of an interlocutor’s storied self as something more than a person who thinks certain things, has a certain opinion, or has a certain question. In the examples discussed above, for the most part, students’ utterances do not meet this criterion. Storytelling, on the other hand, always reveals something about the storyteller beyond that fact that they believe certain things or have certain questions; it makes explicit that a given utterance belongs to the speaker.

In the three groups whose discussions I facilitated, this kind of storytelling was a departure from our prevalent discourse style. Across the twenty-two discussions, I documented several different kinds of storytelling, which I term historical stories, metacognitive stories, hypothetical stories, and self-stories. A historical story generally prefaces an informational comment, explaining how one came to know something; a metacognitive story relates something about how one is thinking about the topic of discussion; a hypothetical story involves a speaker imagining what they would do under certain circumstances; and a self-story recounts something concrete from the storyteller’s life (see Table 9 below). Self-storytelling strikes me as generally the most intimate and vulnerable form of self-revelation, though I can imagine moments in which historical, hypothetical, and metacognitive storytelling could be equally risky. With my interest in examining how we encountered and responded to each other as unique (and uniquely storied) individuals, for the purposes of the following analysis, I focus on moments of self-storytelling, as these most obviously reveal our dialogic authoring of ourselves and each other.

Table 9: Kinds of Storytelling

Kind of Story	Definition	Example
Historical story	How you came to know something	“I looked it up last minute, it’s like five states. It’s legal in five states.” (Sydney)
Metacognitive story	How you are thinking about something	“I mean Derya actually made a really good point...So I actually don’t know now, if [abortion’s] good or bad.” (Luis)
Hypothetical story	How you might respond under certain circumstances	“If I was to be pregnant right now, I would probably get an abortion.” (Jane)

Self-story	How something happened/happens to you	“I like freeze, freeze up and stuff...if [a test] is like, timed or something.” (Sandy)
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The moments of self-storytelling reported in this chapter were not uncommon in our discussions—each discussion had at least one and some had several—but they departed sufficiently from the typical mode of interaction that they often had a different feel than the surrounding discourse. As students talked about themselves and people they knew, there was a sense that they were not merely sharing ideas but sharing themselves with the group. Attuned to our discourse with regards to the dimensions of Dialogue, I was initially enthusiastic about these moments as expressions of *answerability* in which students made themselves present to each other in their particularity. As I have examined them more closely, however, I have come to appreciate more fully how the ethical quality of our discussions can only be understood with regard to how the dimensions of Dialogue interact. From this perspective, it is not the fact that students shared these stories that matters, but how they did so and how they responded to each other’s stories. In other words, it is not so much that students make themselves present to each other with their stories (as if their selves were static and unitary, and therefore presentable), as they dialogically author their storied selves, dynamically making themselves addressable and becoming presenced.

Remember that the potential of any interaction has to do with the kinds of self/Other encounters it engenders. From this perspective, self-storytelling may offer a potentially powerful moment of making oneself differently addressable and engendering different kinds of encounters. However, as discussed above, the quality of those encounters depends both on how someone shares a story (e.g., how the storyteller is rendered addressable) and how their interlocutors respond, addressing or not addressing that which they made addressable, and presencing the storyteller in certain ways.

Example 1: (Not) Addressing the Addressable

This first example, which represents Rosa's only unsolicited comment in Group 2's discussions, illustrates how making oneself addressable through storytelling is no guarantee that one will be addressed differently, if at all. Some background: Rosa only attended seven out of the twelve sessions that took place between October and November 2019. She was classified as an English Language Learner and was rather reticent during the discussions but was often talkative and giggly in the time before and after, especially with Yvette, her closest friend in the group. On the day of this discussion, as we walked to our meeting place in the library, I told Rosa and Yvette that I would love to hear their thoughts about toxic masculinity during our discussion. Yvette responded, saying, "But you always ask questions to go deeper" (Memo 11/20/2019). I responded, saying that I was not planning to intervene much during the discussion, so she would not have to worry about that.

The portion of the discussion from which the following excerpt is taken was largely a response to a YouTube video we watched, in which a female narrator argued that the use of the term "toxic masculinity" discouraged masculine behaviors that are actually beneficial to society. Several students, Jimena and Sandy in particular, had taken issue with this argument, drawing on their lived experiences to speak back to the narrator. The group had discussed how, contrary to the argument of the video, women (including Jimena's and Jabari's mothers) are perfectly capable of raising children on their own, though they amended this stance slightly by saying that it was still important to have a father figure of some kind. Subsequently, Jimena had introduced a new idea about how the video we watched had implied that effeminate men were bad—an idea she disputed. During this time, Yvette and Rosa had been whispering and writing in Rosa's notebook in what seems to be preparation for the following comment. It is not entirely clear in

the video, but it seems that Yvette wrote out “I don’t need my father for be happy” for Rosa.

After Jimena spoke, Rosa said:

Transcript 5		
Rosa	I...	1
David	Yeah?	2
Rosa	I feel like for me like, I don't need my father for be happy. I can be happy with my mom, [<i>throws hands up</i>] only me and her. [<i>throws hands up</i>] Like that's...	3 4
Amala	[<i>Raises hand</i>] [David: nod] So, adding on to what she [<i>pointing to Sandy</i>] said about how she [the female narrator] made women seem weak, she like used stereotypes of women and men. Like, men should be strong, like this type of thing and then, women need a strong man, but she should've like made them both seem equal. 'Cause she... yeah.	5 6 7 8 9

By volunteering this comment, Rosa made herself newly addressable as a willing participant in the discussion (something I was eager to support) and by alluding to her relationship with her parents, she made herself addressable as someone who believes she does not need her father to be happy. This implicit storytelling fleshed out her physical presence by making her addressable in at least these two new ways. However, rather than responding to this newly addressable Rosa, Amala returned to an idea that had been brought up previously. Perhaps it was Rosa’s accent combined with her previous reticence which, for Amala, may have raised questions about her willingness and ability to elaborate in English; perhaps it was the possibility that the story would be intensely personal and uncomfortable for the group to discuss; or perhaps it was the fact that Rosa’s comment did not follow directly from the preceding comment or add much conceptually to the discussion; whatever the reason, Amala’s comment does not address Rosa at all. Though Rosa theoretically remained addressable as someone with a potentially fraught history with her parents, the group never addressed her as such, and her presence in the group was largely unchanged, despite the self-revelation in her implicit storytelling. Rather than

addressing Rosa, Amala addressed the video’s narrator, presencing her as someone who uses gender stereotypes.

Amala’s response is understandable in the context of a classroom discussion; in some ways, it fits better in the flow of the conversation than Rosa’s simple story because it more directly advances the conceptual discussion and more clearly follows Jimena’s comment. Understood conceptually, Rosa’s self-story does not add anything new to the conversation, but from the perspective of relational becoming, it opens up the possibility of encountering Rosa and her parents as individuals with unique voices and perspectives. Because Rosa only alludes to the story, she leaves much of the presencing work (of herself and her parents) to her classmates who do not seem to notice or respond to her newly addressable storied self.

Example 2: Presencing a Generic Other

Although I think it would have been better had the group addressed Rosa, simply addressing her is no guarantee that she would have been differently presented in the group. I became especially aware of this dynamic as I studied the following excerpt from one of Group 3’s discussions about abortion. In it, Derya, a student who had self-identified as Muslim earlier in the week during a get-to-know-you activity, made several comments that invoked her Muslim identity. Referring to other students’ seeming disbelief that a father might beat his daughter if he found out that she had become pregnant outside of wedlock, Derya asked rhetorically, “Have you met Muslim fathers?” Shortly thereafter, the following exchange took place:

Transcript 6		
Derya	“They’ll send people back to Iraq for that. [David: Hm.] Like it’s so strict. Like that’s what I’m trying to say is like, it’s crazy.”	1 2
Brandin	Like, like don’t- why the whole lot like... Why do y’all wear the little thing, thing on your head?	3 4

Derya	No. Not everyone wears it.	5
Brandin	Y'all don't got to?	6
Derya	No. Some people are like really, really religious so they do that.	7
Patience	They say it represents purity.	8
Brandin	Y'all don't have to, though?	9
Derya	But some people, like no, like some people they look after their mother and carry the religion when they do the head stuff like that. And some people are religious but they don't like, you know, they wear whatever they want.	10 11 12
Brandin	Oh. Y- you don't gotta wear it?	13
Derya	Uh-uh (negative), you don't got to. It's not like you have to.	14
Patience	Don't they judge you if you don't?	15
Derya	No, they don't really judge you if you don't. Like, at, like a lot of like Kurdish people and Middle Eastern people don't.	16 17
David	Interesting	18
Derya	Yeah.	19
Brandin	All right. Mine is, uh, a young couple just doesn't feel ready to be parents yet. Uh...	20 21

Derya's comment in line 1 makes her addressable in relation to Iraq, which, in the United States, is strongly associated with Islam. Although, as with Rosa, she only alludes to some personal story or stories, in light of her previous self-identification, she discursively positions herself as Muslim, opening the door for Brandin to address her as such in lines 3-4. Brandin's question, unrelated to the topic of discussion, seems like an authentic expression of his curiosity, which strikes me as a good thing, but it also problematically addresses Derya as a representative of a broader collective rather than a unique individual with a particular relationship to Islam. In other words, he seems to address her as a generic Muslim. Speaking in relation to "y'all" (lines 3, 6, 9) he asks about the hijab which, notably, Derya does not wear. Dressed more or less like

the other students, her Muslim identity was not immediately evident and had to be revealed and rendered addressable discursively, as it was above. Although Brandin's original question responded to this moment of implicit self-disclosure, it does not actually lead to Derya becoming particularly revealed to the group apart from the fact that she is in a position to know something about Muslims—which was already evident in her earlier comments. Her own comments make her addressable in relation to Muslim culture and as a Muslim. Brandin and Patience respond, addressing her as someone who can speak for Muslims generally, but neither they nor Derya presence her as a unique individual who, among other things, considers herself to be Muslim and does not wear the hijab.

This kind of dialogically authored *presencing* is the result of the quality of students' dialogue, specifically, how they address each other and make themselves addressable. In this instance, Brandin uses the second person plural (lines 3, 6, 9) and Patience invokes two unspecified *theys* (lines 8, 15), referring to broad groups of people rather than addressing Derya directly. Responding to and perpetuating this impersonal mode of address, Derya talks about ambiguous groups of people, referring to what "some people" (lines 7, 10, 11) think about the hijab rather than explaining her own perspective. The result is a generic discussion with unclear implications for Derya herself. Although Derya figures in these responses somehow, it remains unclear how she feels about the hijab, why she does not wear it, to what extent she identifies with Islam, let alone what she was alluding to regarding Muslim fathers. Although each interlocutor bears some responsibility for this, the exchange takes place on Brandin's terms such that, satisfied with the answer to his question, he moves on, shifting the discussion back to the question of abortion (line 20), and he is not resisted for doing so. The group has learned that Derya does not consider the hijab to be mandatory, nor does she think that the many who do not

wear it are judged for their choice, but Derya herself has only been presented as a person who knows these things.

Derya's story made her addressable in a new way, but the subsequent interaction shaped how her newly addressable self was ultimately presented in the group. While it is the case that Derya identifies as Muslim (a label she explicitly claims elsewhere in our conversations), her identity also overflows that label. It is true that Derya is Muslim, but to interact with her simply as a Muslim disregards how *she* is Muslim; she is not a generic Muslim; there are none, in fact. I do not mean to suggest that it is necessarily wrong to abstract generalities from a population, only that we should never assume that, in understanding the abstraction, we have understood any individual. An abstraction can be useful, but it can also afford unethical relations. Because our group never moved beyond understanding Derya's relationship with Islam as anything more than that of a generic Muslim, we implicitly applied to her a "secondhand definition" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 58).

Example 3: Presencing and Addressing Potential Interlocutors

In the previous two examples, I have discussed how self-storytelling, even when the stories remain implicit, can make storytellers addressable to their interlocutors in new ways. However, as I have also shown, how the storytellers are ultimately presented in the group is negotiated dialogically, as the storyteller and listeners respond to each other. I now consider another function of storytelling, which is to presence potential interlocutors who are not physically present with the group, making them addressable, as in the example below. This excerpt comes from one of Group 3's discussions about toxic masculinity, after several students shared ideas and personal stories about how men and women are treated differently in certain situations. Brandin talked about how his grandmother always asks him to take out the trash rather

than his female relatives, Aliyah talked about how her mother insists that her brothers carry heavy groceries in from the car, and Carlos talked about how women sometimes got paid less than men for doing the same job. Riffing on this theme, Patience related the following story:

Transcript 7		
Patience	Yeah. My mom used to, well she still do make the boys, him [Brandin] and my brother cut the grass. [David: Mm-hmm.] And I used to like, go out there and wanna help and stuff and she used to be like, nah, nah. And I'm just like, why can't I help like [David: Mm] just 'cause I'm a girl, don't mean nothing. I'm a girl and I do a lot of stuff. [David: Mm-hmm.] Like I'm a girl and I lift a lot of stuff and it just kinda irritating sometimes 'cause it's like, you don't see the value in what girls have. You just see that [David: Right] men are supposed to be like [David: Hm.] more like aggressive or stronger, when that's not the case. [David: Yeah.] I mean this is not a bad thing but like, I wish they would, they would see that in women too.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
David	Yeah. Yeah so what I hear you saying this, like, I said, you know, it could be a good thing to say men are brave and strong or whatever, but you bring up that, the danger in that is, if by saying that, you imply that women are not that, right? Like if men are brave and strong, what does that mean about women? And one thing that people could say is like, that means women are not so much those things. Right?	11 12 13 14 15 16
Patience	Mm-hmm (affirmative).	17
David	Yeah. So, I've, I think that's a, good point.	18

In her first turn at talk, Patience begins by telling a story about how she, as a girl, was discouraged from mowing the lawn (lines 1-3). This portion is spoken in the habitual past (“used to”). Although it is not entirely clear where the story stops, and if a younger Patience ever explicitly resisted her mother’s gendered division of household labor, the verb tense shifts at the end of line 3 to the present tense. Whether or not her self-quotation (starting with “I’m just like” on lines 3-4) is meant to be part of the story or to reflect her current thinking, it represents a response to her mother. Note how the story makes Patience’s mother addressable and how Patience addresses her directly, using the second person (lines 6-9) to articulate her frustration

and assert herself as a capable woman. As she concludes her comment (lines 9-10), Patience broadens her response to a generic “they,” suggesting that the issues she encountered with her mother are prevalent beyond her household—that her mother is part of a vague collective that tends to see certain characteristics in men and not in women.

Following both Patience’s lead and my own schooled inclinations toward the abstract, my response addresses this final comment and fails to address anything other than the supposed message of Patience’s story. This comment takes what “I hear [Patience] saying” (line 11) and translates it into a generalizable principle—that the danger of having a normative vision of masculinity is that it implies that women do not/should not have the characteristics ascribed to men. Although I believe there is value in this kind of reflective listening, in this case, it cost the presence of Patience’s mother. After Patience confirms that this was what she was saying, I characterize the idea as a “good point” (line 18). Indeed, it seems that her story became, in my mind, merely a vehicle for a message, and that, in the end, the message was all I heard her saying. Consequently, I do not address Patience as anything other than someone with a point to make in the discussion, as the owner of a certain idea, nor does it occur to me to address her mother.

In this episode, we seem to fail to fully address two interlocutors who became newly addressable: Patience and her mother. Patience’s mother was, of course, not physically present, and was represented secondhand, but she is still a person with a particular point of view who could be presenced and rendered addressable in a variety of ways to the group. To be clear, I am not suggesting that we necessarily have the same ethical obligations to narrativized individuals as to those with whom we are physically present, but I think we do have some obligations and can mutually benefit from seeking to be in dialogue to the extent possible. In this example, by

ventriloquating and addressing her mother, Patience was able to articulate some of her own thoughts and feelings, but her final comment closes off her mother's addressability, suggesting that her story is an example of a broader trend and, relatedly, that her mother need not be addressed as a unique individual—at least, not by anyone else in the group. Perhaps this abstractive closure functions to protect her mother, or perhaps it is simply due to some schoolish sense that a comment should do more than tell stories—that it should have some generalizable message. Whatever the reason, neither Patience nor other members of the group address her mother further. And Patience herself is addressed simply as someone with a “good point” (line 18), not as a young woman who has felt that her gender excludes her from certain activities and makes other people, including her mother, view her as less capable than she considers herself to be. Rather than dealing with any of the emotional or relational complexities of her story, the conversation proceeds based solely on an abstraction. This seems largely due to my response, which treats her story as a vehicle for her final comment, translating it entirely into an abstract plane.

This episode reveals a pattern that will be evident in the following two examples, namely, a tendency to translate stories into abstractions and to relate to each other as bearers of ideas, and not as embodied, thinking-feeling, storied selves. Patience's abstraction of her mother seems to manifest an emerging form of this pattern, while my response and the following examples show it in its maturity.

Example 4: Reducing a Story to a Moral

The following example comes from Group 1's discussion of physician's assisted suicide (PAS) in which Liam, after telling a personal story, immediately translates it into an abstract principle. Remember that this group was composed of undergraduates studying at a prestigious

university, something that is evident not simply in their diction, but in their fluency with abstractions. My growing sense is that this discursive move is the kind of thing that is cultivated and rewarded in school and, consequently, something that successful students like Liam are well-practiced in. While this kind of abstraction is not inherently bad, it comes at a cost. Notice how, in the following example, it forecloses certain forms of presencing, address, and response.

Transcript 8		
Liam	Okay, so this is pretty intense and extreme but... So, okay. My stepdad, he has this kind of... He's got this muscle disease, and that means his muscles are slowly degenerating. And, there might come a time where he just won't be able to move, and will be tied to a bed, because... He just won't be able to do anything else. And he's very adamant about not wanting to live anymore at that time. And since, I think, in Germany, I don't think it's legal, so what he wants... He basically has this plan where there's this procedure where we could bring some kind of poison to his room, we would have to leave the room, so that we're not culpable, and then he can just ingest it himself. So that's what he says. It's intense. And he doesn't want to do it now, he's fine right now. But, what I'm saying is it's certainly possible to commit suicide without a physician's assistance. So what are the arguments that it's so necessary? Why would... I don't understand why you would go to the trouble of moving to a different state and doing all this legal application, when you can- there are other ways to end your life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14
Joe	I mean, I think part of that might just be... I'm trying to be super careful. Maybe the way that suicide is viewed in this country, and in society... I don't know. I just feel like if somebody was struggling with something, with an illness or something, and I said, "Hey, why don't you just go kill yourself?", that probably would not be received, I think, as well as if, kind of saying to them, "How about you kind of go talk to your physician and kind of see what kind of options are available?" And I just think maybe it's kind of... I don't know. The culture, or the connotation of just committing suicide, kind of on your own, that kind of prevents people from wanting to do that. Because, I mean, I think you're right. There's no reason that these other people can't commit suicide. But I do think it's kind of just that... I don't know, culture connotations kind of associated with it on its own.	15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

In his comment, Liam presences his stepfather, prefacing his story with the acknowledgement that “this is pretty intense and extreme” (line 1). After telling the story, he concludes, saying, “So that’s what he says. It’s intense” (line 10), adding as an assurance, “And he doesn’t want to do it now, he’s fine right now” (lines 10-11). As I read it, these are the only

moments in this exchange in which Liam's stepfather is addressed (along with Liam himself), albeit tangentially, as an embodied, thinking-feeling being; everywhere else, his story is represented and responded to merely as an illustration of a principle. After telling the story and assuring the class that his stepfather is not currently contemplating suicide, Liam says, "But, what I'm saying is it's certainly possible to commit suicide without a physician's assistance. So what are the arguments that it's so necessary?" (lines 10-12). This comment not only translates the story into a concept (i.e., that suicide does not require a physician) but explicitly invites a response on the same plane of abstraction, presenting his stepfather as an example of a concept, subsumed within a broader whole, and limiting, in the process, his unique addressability. And indeed, Joe responds on this plane of abstractions, even conjuring up a hypothetical person "struggling with...an illness or something" (lines 18-19), rather than addressing Liam's stepfather. His comment, "I think you're right" (line 25) is revealing in this regard, implying that he understood the comment, story included, as nothing more than a defensible point in an argument and not the revelation of newly addressable Others. This simplifies the story to a moral and, in the process, limits the presence of its characters (who have simply functioned as vehicles for the moral).

As noted, this is the kind of response Liam invites; Joe complies, and together they jointly accomplish the abstraction of Liam's stepfather. In the end, the living reality of a person facing the prospect of a bedridden life and a stepson asked to endorse and perhaps even play a complicit role in a suicide has been replaced by a hypothetical somebody and an abstract principle. Liam acknowledges the intensity of his story, but otherwise presents himself simply as someone familiar with his stepfather's plans and who sees them as evidence of the idea that suicide is already accessible to anyone willing to carry it out. By telling the story, Liam makes

himself addressable as a stepson of someone with suicidal contingency plans related to his muscular degeneration, but by translating the story into a specific principle and inviting abstract responses, he presences himself simply as a knower—as someone with a particular stance in the ongoing discussion. And, predictably, this is how Joe addresses him—and there is no further mention of Liam’s stepfather.

Example 5: Approaching (and Retreating From) Dialogue

My comments in the final example manifest this same pattern, though I think they also show a nascent sense of a potentially more Dialogic mode of facilitating discussions. This episode took place during Group 2’s third and final discussion about abortion, in which Jabari shares with the group that his mother had aborted a pregnancy “a long time ago.” This was particularly notable to me because, up to this point, Jabari had generally argued for positions that would be considered “pro-life.” In our very first discussion, for example, after Sandy suggested that a family without the means to provide for a child would be justified in getting an abortion, Jabari said, “If they’re like poor and stuff, and don’t have enough money to take care of the baby, then can’t they just like put it up for adoption instead of killing it?” He seemed to view abortion as a form of homicide and consequently struggled to justify it as an alternative to adoption, so I wondered if learning that his mother had had an abortion would be disturbing and disorienting.

On the day of the final discussion, I had asked the students to write in their journal about the abortion policies they would institute if they had the chance. This admittedly simplistic prompt was designed to elicit and concretize students’ opinions in order to help them take a stand and engage with the implications of each other’s ideas. In terms I introduced previously, the prompt elicited students’ hypothetical stories. Jabari volunteered to begin the discussion by

paraphrasing his journal entry, saying that he thought abortion was justifiable in some situations (e.g., in the case of rape), adding, “but like if you're getting pregnant like with your husband and then you guys just like don't want the baby at all, then that's when I think you should just have the baby and put it up for adoption.” Noting some exceptions, he still positions himself as generally opposed to abortion, focusing his attention on a hypothetical situation in which adoption would be preferable to abortion. Following Jabari, Jimena explained that she would permit abortion “if like you don't have the funds,” comparing her ideal abortion policy with the way the government provides health insurance for people below a certain income level. Jabari seemed to appreciate this idea, remarking affirmatively, “Yeah, it just depends on the situation.” When Jimena finished explaining her idea, the following exchange took place:

Transcript 9		
Jabari	Another thing is that- Well, this has really nothing to do with like, [<i>gesturing to what he had written in his notebook</i>] this whole thing, but I asked my mom about it and it turns out she actually had an abortion a long time ago and she was actually supposed to have twins, another set of twins, and I guess she didn't decide to have them because she didn't have enough funds at the time, and that was like a while back. So we would- we would have like, six people in our house. [<i>David: Hmm.</i>] Which would've been a lot.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
David	Interesting. Well, so what do you think about that?	8
Jabari	Um, I think it's understandable. She told me why she couldn't really have them, and I wasn't like angry at her for that or anything, so... Like, yeah I guess it's really just situational, really. Yeah, that's all I have.	9 10 11
David	Interesting. How does- so I'm- if you don't mind sharing, how does your- does your mom feel like that was the right thing to do? Does she-	12 13

Jabari	She said she kinda like... She says the- she kinda like... Well, she said it would've been hard to raise like all six of us, because she was a single mom for like most of her life, and she had like her first baby in her senior year, so she kinda just like- She never really had like, a personal life. She's always had to like, take care of, us the entire time, and I guess she just didn't wanna, have that many people to deal with, 'cause she would've still had like way more kids, and by the time we were all grown up, she probably would've passed away or would've been like, super old by now. She hasn't really had any time to herself, really, because she's been taking care of all of us, so.	14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22
David	Interesting...So far I'm hearing people are saying there are situations when abortion is okay. We seem to agree that rape is one of those. Do we all agree that uh poverty is another reason for [<i>Students "Mm-hmm" affirmatively</i>]... Does anyone disagree? Would anyone say that's not a good enough reason?...I guess I'm thinking about Ivan, Yvette, and Jared. You've tended to be more on the pro-life side. Would you say if someone's poor, they should be able to get an abortion?	23 24 25 26 27 28 29

In his first turn at talk, Jabari begins by separating the story he is about to tell from the journal entry and, by extension, his earlier comment, saying, “this has really nothing to do with like...this whole thing” (lines 1-2). This seems both to create space for him to tell a story that may not align with the stance he has generally taken in our discussions, and to set the story apart from the ongoing discussion. He proceeds to tell the story, which is both autobiographical (“I asked my mom about it,” lines 2-3) and biographical (“she actually had an abortion a long time ago and she was actually supposed to have twins, another set of twins,” lines 3-5), a tension that lingers throughout this episode. With the basic narrative told, he says, “I guess she didn't decide to have them because she didn't have enough funds at the time” (lines 5-6). I suspect that this is his own commentary more than the continued retelling of his mother’s story both because he begins with “I guess” and because he uses the term “funds,” which Jimena introduced. This latter point is significant because, in the context of the discussion, the word invokes a situation in which abortion would be considered permissible. As he makes his mother addressable to the group, he presences her as someone who meets the criteria Jimena introduced for justifiably

aborting a pregnancy. The comment concludes on a similarly sympathetic note, as Jabari imagines what it would have been like to have two additional people in the house (lines 6-8).

In response, I simply say, “Interesting” (line 9) and ask what he thinks about that. This is a pedagogical move oriented toward answerability, a response to the sympathetic but noncommittal quality of his storytelling. I seem to want him to reconnect the story and “this whole thing” (line 2)—our discussion about ideal abortion policies. He responds first somewhat vaguely in terms of his emotional reaction, saying that his mother’s choice was “understandable” and he says, “I wasn’t like angry at her” (lines 10-11). Describing his reaction in negative terms implies an audience that might have expected an angry response, suggesting again that Jabari is aware of the possible discrepancy between his mother’s choice and his own previously stated opinions. Perhaps sensing this and, relatedly, that I wanted him to take some kind of stand, Jabari restates the idea he formulated in response to Jimena’s proposal with a pseudo-stance, saying, “I guess it’s really just situational” (line 12). In this moment, Jabari’s pseudo-stance seems to provide him some space to process and withhold judgement on his mother’s story which, as I learned in a subsequent interview, she may have told him only the night before this conversation.

Given this context, a pseudo-stance of this kind is certainly understandable and seems indicative of Jabari’s evolving understanding. It also indicates something about what he thought I intended with my question. Although the question “what do you think about that?” could yield a wide variety of responses, he seems to interpret it as a request to take a stand that can be articulated in terms of a general principle. Given my orientation toward abstractions evident in my response to Patience’s story and at the conclusion of this episode, Jabari’s interpretation seems reasonable. His comment “Yeah, that’s all I have” (line 12) can be read as a bid to be

excused not simply from further comment, but from this kind of comment, as if to say that he does not necessarily want to subject his mother's story to this kind of schoolish scrutiny.

Sensing that Jabari may not be comfortable opining on his mother's choice but also wanting to continue discussing the story he shared, I change tack and ask him to speak on his mother's behalf. The question I initially begin to articulate asks how she feels about her choice, but I ultimately narrow the question to whether she thinks it was the right thing to do (lines 12-13). This narrowed question resonates with my broader tendency toward abstract concepts and limits the responses available to Jabari—in fact, it affords a yes/no answer—but it also represents a moment of seeking to address an interlocutor, Jabari's mom, who has been made newly addressable through storytelling; it invites her voice into the discussion. Jabari struggles at first to speak for her (line 15), but eventually finds a rhythm, imagining what it would have been like to be a single mother of six kids. Perhaps the struggle is to respond to my narrowed question (something he never actually does) or to share something so personal and still somewhat unprocessed, but it also seems to reflect Jabari's simultaneous search for both his mother's voice and his own—what Bakhtin (1984) refers to as the “highly intense struggle of *I* and *other*” (p. 295). As he remembers what his mother told him, imagines her choice and retells her story, we see him dialogically authoring her not only for the group, but for himself. A twin himself, Jabari seems to identify with his imaginary unaborting siblings, using the first person plural (“all six of us,” line 16) and entering into the timespace of this alternative reality (“she probably would've passed away or would've been like, super old by now,” lines 22-23). Indeed, by the end, this imagined world and the present are blurred, as he speaks in the perfect (“hasn't really had any time to herself,” line 23) and perfect progressive (“been taking care of all of us,” line 24) tenses, suggesting that this is not purely hypothetical. In other words, Jabari is not simply imagining

how his mother would justify her choice; he has begun to “translate” the story from her point of view into his. He is not merely ventriloquating her but is retelling and reworking her story in his own voice and from his own perspective. I think this is also evident in the tonal shift that begins at lines 19-20, when Jabari begins to speak in a less formal, more hyperbolic, and less fragmented style.

In doing this, Jabari further presents his mom as a single mother of four whose first child was conceived in her senior year (of high school, I presume); a woman who at one point in time was struggling to take care of both herself and her children, who decided that, rather than bearing another pair of twins, it would be best to abort her pregnancy. Although I have never met Jabari’s mom, I began to imagine her, a woman making complicated choices in a world that surely has not always been hospitable to her. There are obviously dangers of stereotyping and other forms of assumption-making in this kind of characterization, but it represents how Jabari’s story presented, for me, a potential interlocutor, someone I might address, whose voice I might, to some degree, hear and respond to—the means, in fact, to move beyond types and stereotypes and encounter a living person. While Jimena’s proposal was an interesting thought experiment, Jabari’s story introduced us to a person who was actually in a position to decide between pregnancy and abortion.

Of course, by telling the story and responding to my questions, Jabari did not simply present his mother, but also presented himself to the group, making himself addressable with regards to his upbringing, family situation, and evolving perspective on abortion. In a sense, the constitution of the group had changed, as Jabari became Jabari-with-a-mother, this particular mother who had also, in a way, joined the group. As I have suggested previously, that kind of ethico-onto-epistemological development matters in terms of Dialogue because it makes group

members capable of new and different responses to newly/differently addressable interlocutors. By telling the story, Jabari invited us all, himself included, to grapple with his mother's complicated choice, to hear her voice (as well as his own), and to respond. It also invited us to understand abortion not merely in terms of abstract principles, but as a thing in the world which is made meaningful in particular ways to diverse individuals in unique situations. In other words, it afforded us the opportunity to encounter a new interlocutor (or a familiar interlocutor in a new way), a person for whom abortion has some particular meaning, and to respond to them from our unique place in Being.

In that light, the final move I make as a facilitator in lines 25-31 strikes me as a failure to tap much of the Dialogic potential of Jabari's story, to address the interlocutors that had become newly or differently addressable. Perhaps because Jabari had already made a bid to be excused from further comment (line 12), perhaps due to the sensitivity of the topic, perhaps simply in an effort to involve other students in the discussion, particularly those who tended to be more pro-life, I shift the focus away from the story, summarizing the group's preliminary consensus, and asking if anyone disagrees with the idea that being poor is a sufficient reason to abort a pregnancy. While there may be nothing inherently wrong with this move, in this instance, it does two problematic things: It translates Jabari's story into an abstraction, something he never does, and removes all reference to his mother. The former imposes my reductive interpretation of the story and the latter depersonalizes the idea. Although I implicitly ask students to respond to Jabari's story, I seriously constrain the kinds of responses they might give; rather than inviting them to respond to Jabari or to his mom, I ask them to respond to my depersonalized abstraction of their story.

Chapter Commentary

In the two sections of this chapter, I have drawn on the lenses of presencing and addressability to examine the ethico-ontological quality and, often, the untapped potential of our discussions. Conceptually, these lenses have helped me attune to the records of the discussions in a way that illuminates an important aspect of Dialogue: the extent to which interlocutors make themselves addressable, respond to each other, and ultimately become presenced to each other as unique, storied, thinking-feeling, embodied, and relational persons. I have also documented a variety of ways in which we may have both approximated and avoided that kind of discourse, as summarized in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Addressability and Responses

		How do speakers make themselves addressable?	How do interlocutors respond to changes in speaker's addressability?
Part 1	Noemi	Negative addressability, pseudo-stance, non-participator	Lack of address; address generic Other
	Brodie	Ventriloquist, pseudo-stance	Clarifying questions (conceptual)
Part 2	Example #1 (Rosa)	Implicit self-story	Lack of address
	Example #2 (Derya)	Implicit self-story and generic responses	Address a generic Other
	Example #3 (Patience)	Explicit self-story	Introduce and address a specific Other, but close off further address, reduce story to principle (Patience)
			Reduce story to a principle (David)
	Example #4 (Liam)	Explicit self-story	Introduce a specific Other, but close off further address; reduce story to principle (Liam)
Reduce story to a principle (Joe)			
Example #5 (Jabari)	Explicit self-story, pseudo-stance	Introduce and sympathize with specific Other (Jabari)	
		Seek to imagine and ventriloquate Other (Jabari and David)	
		Reduce story to a principle (David)	

Recognizing that the nature of the meaningful world is at stake, including students' places relative to each other and to the subject matter, the above analysis demands that we consider not simply whether but *how* students are addressed, as this is what ultimately shapes their presence in the group and, by extension, who they become together. Looking across these examples, we see that, although students were addressed (by me and by each other), and while they were generally addressed civilly, by and large, they were only addressed on the ideational plane—with regards to their ideas, opinions, reasons, and beliefs.

Indeed, as I expect is the case in many classrooms, there was a clear tendency to relate to each other in terms of abstractions, even as students shared self-stories. This kind of abstractive co-authoring is evident both in how group members made themselves and narrativized Others addressable to the group and in how they responded to each other. When Noemi takes a pseudo-stance, Brodie acts merely as a ventriloquist, and Derya assumes the mantle of spokesperson for Muslims; when I respond to Noemi as a generic shy person, Brandin and Patience address Derya as a generic Muslim, and the group responds to narrativized Others simply as instances of a principle, we fail to relate to each other as unique persons with a particular perspective. By this I do not simply mean that we fail to relate to each other as individuals with certain views on the discussion topic (as Bakhtin's ocular metaphor might suggest), but as uniquely embodied, storied, relationally enmeshed, thinking-feeling persons-in-dialogue.

This tendency is troubling in an ethico-ontological light because it limits the possibilities of relational becoming. There is nothing inherently wrong with addressing someone on the ideational plane, but if that is the only way that they are addressed, only certain kinds of presence and becoming are possible. Assuming that the patterns I have documented here are similar to those in other classroom discussions, it is likely that students are presenced in these contexts (at

least during school-sanctioned activities) primarily with regards to their ideas, opinions, beliefs, and reasons—on the ideational plane. The kinds of becoming produced in these patterns of addressability and presencing which are most valued in school might be reflected in students' grades and levels of mastery of given standards, but alongside these developments, students are also coming to understand themselves in relation to school, subject matters, peers, etc. The world that is being authored in school is much thicker than a report card. Expanding the ways in which students are addressed in school may not immediately change their grades, but it might affect these other aspects of the world. And who knows who they might become together with these additional possibilities of being presenced in school?

While we do not know the answer to that question, we do have a fairly clear idea of who students are likely to become, given the status quo: Mainstream students who buy into the idea of school will be addressed as successful (e.g., Heath, 1982); students from other backgrounds will either assimilate (becoming addressable as successful) or be marginalized (being addressed as unsuccessful and even dangerous) (e.g., Bronkhorst & Akkerman, 2016; Paris, 2012); and, over time, students will become increasingly disengaged, making themselves addressable in limited ways (e.g., Lopez, 2009). Of course, these tendencies are not the simple and direct result of how teachers facilitate classroom discussions, but those discussions participate in and perpetuate broader systems of school. I sense this keenly in relation to discussions I facilitated, excerpts of which I analyzed in this chapter. Although I think there were some positive developments and moments that seemed to depart from the conventions of schooling, the discussions often had a rather schoolish feel. Based on the analysis in this chapter, I have come to think that much of that schoolishness is related to how students are rendered addressable, how they are addressed, and how they address each other. If that is true, one way to begin conceptualizing how school might

change and be changed is to consider these patterns of addressability and how they might evolve, opening up other possibilities of presence in school.

Chapter 5: Cultivating Dialogic Genres of Classroom Discussions

In the previous chapter, I analyzed processes of presencing (i.e., how students became present in/to the group), arguing that this can be understood in terms of how students rendered themselves addressable and how they were subsequently addressed. The high-level takeaway is simply that presence is not given but accomplished, and that who students become together is a function of the quality of their d/Dialogic relations. I also highlighted how, across the groups, we were repeatedly drawn toward abstractions, even as students shared self-stories and rendered themselves addressable in highly personal ways. In this chapter, I consider why this might have been and how it might be addressed. Recognizing that our encounters with each other do not emerge *ex nihilo* but build on the residue of previous encounters—what Bakhtin (1986) would call “speech genres”—I consider the influence of previous discussion genres on our interactions as well as my pedagogical efforts to cultivate different, more Dialogic genres. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus my analysis on the concept/practice of “signing your name” as it was taken up by Group 1, and the concept/practice of “looping for understanding” as it was taken up by Group 3. In both cases, we experienced what I will call “genre interference,” a kind of friction in adopting new concepts/practices in our discursive repertoire. I take this friction as evidence of the interference of other genres, which I seek to characterize in my analysis.

(Non)Dialogic Genres

Genres can be understood as the residue of past experiences that shape the way we understand and respond to present circumstances. Note that this definition includes but extends beyond textual genres (which is what the term typically refers to) and encompasses speech genres (i.e., typical forms of response) and, more broadly, our general sense of the “kind of thing” that is called for in a given situation. Of particular importance for my considerations here,

genres “accumulate forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p. 5). Recall that, in my ethico-onto-epistemological re-reading of Bakhtin, seeing and interpreting are not merely reactive to reality but productive of it—acts of authorship that actively configure the world, including our place in it relative to others. As Bakhtin (1986d) notes, speech genres depend largely on “how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees,” emphasizing that “[e]ach speech genre in each area of speech communication has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a genre” (p. 95). This is crucial because, in selecting among genres, we (generally subconsciously) set the stage for how we will see and respond to (i.e., author) the Other. For example, if I determine that what is called for in a given situation is “teaching,” that speech genre profoundly shapes the way I see, address, and respond to my interlocutors (who have become “students”). I would likely focus our interactions around a particular subject matter and consider students’ comments outside that subject matter to be off-topic; I might assume that I was more knowledgeable than the students, at least with regard to the subject matter, and I would position students as in need of my input; I would also tend to take an evaluative role, responding to students with a warm criticality, attuned to the accuracy and rigor of their comments, and desirous to foster meaningful learning. Something similar would happen for my interlocutors, who could either reinforce or resist the ways I tried to pedagogically author them. If my interlocutors did not see themselves as my students or as in need of my input, or if they had a different sense of the nature of the pedagogical relationship, they might try to author the situation differently, positioning themselves as knowledgeable, bringing up something outside the boundaries I imposed on the subject matter, etc. Together, we would co-author our joint situation, navigating and negotiating among our differing views of the genre and, in the process, becoming something unique together. Although we would each begin

with some sense of the “kind of thing” we were doing together (i.e., the genre), which would shape our interactions to some degree, the genre does not determine those interactions because no two persons’ understandings of the genre entirely overlap; what we are doing together is always to some degree emergent and improvisational. The genre is a template, but each instantiation of that template is unique, and the template itself is revisable.

It is important to recognize both the historical and emergent qualities of each interaction. Our interactions with other people leave a residue of some kind, which develops over time into recognizable templates (i.e., genres) as we have similar interactions. This profoundly shapes how we relate to/author other people, even if it does not entirely determine how we do so. As noted previously, I suspect that this is why Bakhtin was so interested in understanding novels, and particularly those of Dostoevsky—because, as a genre, they exemplify how one might author the world in a way that allows for Dialogic relations. Bakhtin was insistent that not all genres are equally Dialogic and that not all authors working in a given genre realize its Dialogic potential equally well—that, in fact, Dostoevsky may have been unique in realizing the Dialogic potential of the novel. Thinking analogously, we might consider the affordances and constraints of the genre of classroom discussions as it currently exists with an eye toward maximizing its Dialogic potential or transforming the genre entirely.

As I met with these groups of students to discuss controversial issues and seek Dialogue, we inevitably relied on available speech genres to conceptualize what that meant and what we ought to do in a given moment. In this light, the d/Dialogic quality of our discussions can be understood as largely a function of the speech genres that subconsciously shaped our utterances. There are always differences in interlocutors’ understanding of the genre(s) they mutually participate in, though these differences are not always noticeable. In retrospect, it is clear to me

that in cases like these, in which I deliberately set out to change the way we participated in discussions, I should have expected significant friction. At the time, however, I was surprised about how difficult it was to make the changes I hoped to make. I have come to understand this difficulty in terms of “genre interference.” In what follows, I will analyze the genre interference we experienced in Groups 1 and 3 as I introduced the concepts/practices of name-signing and looping for understanding, respectively.

Name-signing and Looping for Understanding:

I have already touched on name-signing in my analysis of Brodie’s rather obscure discourse style in Chapter 4. Using the terminology of the previous chapter, “signing your name” in the context of a discussion like those I facilitated refers to making yourself addressable as the owner of certain ideas and becoming accountable for them to your interlocutors. A comment like, “In the conservative view, that idea would be highly problematic” seems to have less of a personal signature than “I disagree with that idea” because, in the former, it is unclear how the conservative view corresponds to the view of the speaker. In the latter, on the other hand, the speaker owns their disagreement, speaking not as a representative of conservatism or as someone familiar with conservative views, but as a unique individual. I wanted to encourage name-signing because I believed that, as a concept/practice, it would help us participate in the discussions more answerably.

“Looping for understanding,” the term we used for reflective listening, is more aligned with the responsive dimension of Dialogue, having to do with interlocutors’ careful attention and dynamic openness to each other. The term itself comes from conflict mediation, as discussed in Ripley (2018). To loop for understanding, you respond to an interlocutor’s comment by first restating or paraphrasing their comment and asking if you have understood. This

concept/practice is premised on the understanding that communication is fraught—that we do not always understand each other as well as we might think, and we do not always articulate everything we are thinking. Looping for understanding is a way to attend carefully to your interlocutors and to render them capable of further responses and fuller presence in the dialogue, so it should not be understood merely as a means of clarifying what they said. Because I used the term “looping for understanding” with my students, I will continue to employ it here with the caveat that “understanding” should be understood not only epistemologically, but ethico-ontologically. From this broadened perspective, we might also call it “looping for presencing” or simply “looping back to the Other.” The following exchange, from Group 3’s second discussion about abortion (2/4/2020), illustrates this process. Prior to my first comment recorded below, Brandin had talked about learning that, in the past, women did not abort their pregnancies but if their newborn child was considered deformed, it would be killed. Some students seemed to think that Brandin was advocating for something similar today, and this sparked a flurry of comments about having a “deformed” or “disabled” child. In that context, I addressed Brandin, saying:

Transcript 10		
David	So, so... But you were bringing this up, because it- it related to your view on abortion? [Brandin: Yeah.] You were saying that- that there was a time in the past when- when people couldn't decide whether or not to have a baby. They just kind of had to do it. [Brandin: Mm-hmm]...Uh, and you're saying that's- that's- that's true whether or not the baby was deformed, or handicapped. [Brandin: Yeah] They just had to have the baby and deal with it.	1 2 3 4 5 6
Brandin	Yeah, they just had- had to have it period, you know what I mean?	7
David	Yeah. And you're saying, today, that's- that's not the case, that people can choose whether or not to have a baby.	8 9
Brandin	Yeah. Like- like God. I- He- He didn't send us down here to be having abortions.	10 11
David	He just sent us down here what?	12

Brandin	He didn't send us down here to be having abortions.	13
David	Okay.	14
Patience	True	15
David	So you're- so you're-	16
Brandin	I know, I- I- I ain't really, like the whole time I was talking, I didn't really want to bring up no religious stuff. But I mean, you got to keep it [in mind].	17 18
David	Right. And so, for you, your religion, uh, influences your opinion here. You think that God doesn't want us to have abortions.	20 21
Brandin	Yeah.	22

My comments in lines 1-6, 8-9, and 20-21 are examples of looping for understanding because they articulate my understanding of what Brandin was saying with the intent to confirm with him that I had understood correctly. If Brandin had not immediately responded to my paraphrase of his comments, I would have said something like, “Is that right?”

Note that this exchange did not simply clarify what Brandin had already said but allowed him to explain more fully what he meant and where he was coming from. In other words, looping for understanding is not simply about clarifying what an interlocutor has already said, though it can do that; it also capacitates the speaker of further responses and different addressability. For example, as he suggests in lines 10-11, Brandin objected to abortion on religious grounds. Although this belief seems to have motivated his earlier comments about what he learned in History class, he did not initially want to admit as much (lines 17-18); however, the process of having his comments reflected back to him provided him an opportunity to own that belief. One way to understand this exchange is that my looping for understanding afforded Brandin the opportunity to sign his name, becoming addressable as a religious person who believes that God does not condone abortion.

Because I believe that both name-signing and looping for understanding are concepts/practices with Dialogue potential, I believe that if students learn to tactfully and authentically employ these ways of addressing/responding to the Other, the Dialogic quality of their discussions could improve. In other words, it would be beneficial if classroom discussions, as a speech genre, afforded these kinds of utterances. In the following sections, I recount the ways I attempted to cultivate these concepts/practices and how genre interference was manifest in the process.

Cultivating Name-Signing:

The development of the concept/practice of name-signing in Group 1 can be understood as occurring over five episodes as we discussed controversial issues and reflected on our discussions. In the following sections, I document these episodes, tracing the conceptual/practical development of name-signing across the history of the group and the kinds of genre interference we experienced along the way.

Episode 1: Introducing and Questioning Name-Signing

I first introduced the concept of “signing your name” during Group 1’s metacommunicative reflections on Week 5 (2/5/2019). Based on my observations of the earlier discussions and our reflections about what we should try to do in subsequent discussions, I invited the students to review a transcribed excerpt from our first discussion with an eye towards moments in which students seem to be “speaking for themselves” and “not hiding” in the discourse. When Savannah asked for clarification, I explained it in terms of “distance” from the ideas being discussed, saying:

Transcript 11

David	So one thing that we do when we're talking a lot is to kind of distance ourselves from the thing that we said. And there's a lot of ways you can do that. Um, uh, you know, so one way could be, you make a point and then you say, 'I don't necessarily believe that, just putting that out there for debate.' That- that in my mind is kind of distancing yourself from the idea. So I'm looking for moments when we don't do that, when you're willing to kind of sign your name to the thing that you say.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
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This led to an extended discussion about what it meant in practice to not distance yourself from your ideas/to sign your name to them, and whether or not this was a desirable thing to do in discussions. The students raised a number of questions in both regards, which were the first indications of different genres influencing their understanding and reception of the concept/practice. Ted, for example, asked, “What if your beliefs on the inside actually are uncertain, you know?” This question implies that Ted understood “signing your name” in terms of certainty—that you sign your name to the ideas of which you are certain. Despite my repeated efforts to define the concept otherwise, this understanding persisted alongside other definitions and practices. Although there may be some aspect of Ted’s sense of the discussion genre that predisposed him to understand name-signing in terms of certainty, this understanding also seems to derive from the term itself, with its cultural connotations of finalizing a contract.

As the discussion continued, Liam, with tongue in cheek, said:

Transcript 12		
Liam	Um, so, I'm, so someone else might believe this, potentially that if you, uh, if you publicly commit to a certain opinion, um, you might find it harder in the future to change that opinion. So maybe perhaps in a different universe, that could be a factor that we should be thinking about.	1 2 3 4

From the perspective of genre interference, this is a fascinating comment. On one hand, Liam demonstrates with his exaggerated caution (“someone else might believe this, potentially...maybe perhaps in a different universe,” lines 1-3) how to distance oneself from an

idea. He also defines name-signing as “publicly commit[ting] to a certain opinion” (line 2), which is slightly different from both Ted’s definition and mine, but, like Ted’s, resonant with common cultural connotations of name-signing. Liam goes on to problematize name-signing qua public commitment, arguing that once you commit to an opinion, it becomes harder to change. As other students responded, Liam explained that he was not simply thinking about politicians who might be accused of flip-flopping for changing their position on a given topic, but also about how changing one’s position causes a kind of cognitive dissonance because it “kind of implies that you’ve been acting wrong in the past.”

Responding to Liam, I sought once again to characterize the idea of signing your name differently than the students seemed to be doing, in ways less associated with finality, using terms like “standing somewhere,” being “fully present,” and speaking “as ourselves,” but Liam did not find this satisfying. After asking, “So what would the use of that be?”, he gave the following example:

Transcript 13		
Liam	Let’s say there is a view, there’s an argument, somebody has an argument about immigrat- let’s say the argument is that immigration takes people’s jobs, and what, why is it better to say, ‘I think that more immigrants cause less jobs’ versus saying that there is a line of reasoning that immigrants might take people’s jobs? What’s, what’s the, in that case, what would be the benefit?	1 2 3 4 5

The two hypothetical statements Liam invokes (“I think that more immigrants cause less jobs” and “there is a line of reasoning that immigrants might take people’s jobs”) demonstrate once again how a speaker can be made more or less present in an utterance, but he is not convinced that speaking in such a way would be beneficial. This can be understood as another manifestation of genre interference, not so much about the meaning of the term itself, but about its relative value.

In response, Keith, my co-facilitator, and I tried to explain that we understood dialogue not as a process of coming to ideas, but as a process of coming into certain relations with other people. As I have come to understand it, we were pointing out a fundamental distinction between two of the most visible discussion genres at play in the room, one of which is episteme-centric and one of which is more ethico-ontological. Keith explained, “so I’m responding to my history, I’m responding to the things that I read, I’m responding to the things I think are right and wrong, but it’s me that’s responding, those ideas don’t live in the world, they live in me as a person.” Reiterating this idea, I added that I tried to think of conversations as “an encounter between two people and not between disembodied ideas. And so to encounter someone and to let yourself be encountered, you have to let yourself enter the conversation.” Although I did not have these terms at the time, my response to Liam suggests that signing your name (i.e., speaking answerably) is important because it affords more Dialogic relations, allowing two unique individuals to encounter each other in their particularities. I suspect that this seemed esoteric to the students, and as the discussion continued, we did not return to these ideas.

Episode 2: Invoking Name-Signing in Discussion 1

The following week (2/12/2019), I opened our discussion by reminding students about name-signing, saying:

Transcript 14		
David	Just remember some of the stuff that we've talked about. Uh, and especially this idea of being willing to sign your name to the things that you say, right? Like we can talk about what people might think in the abstract, but, and for this moment here, let's try to share where we stand, what we think about the issue.	1 2 3 4

At least partly in response to this prompting, over the course of the discussion, Liam, Brodie, and Savannah all invoked the term. In the previous chapter, I already discussed at length the portion

of our discussion in which Brodie and Liam mention “signing your name” (see transcript ##), so I will only use excerpts here. As noted, Liam initially uses the term to call out Brodie’s somewhat obscure discourse, asking, “Would you sign your name to that?” Brodie’s immediate response to this question is:

Transcript 15		
Brodie	I personally believe, yeah. At some point you have to consider it’s inethical for you to think, I can have a child, we’ll figure it out after it happens. Like we’ll figure out if this was a life that this child deserved or if this is the life that any human deserved, like I don’t think, I feel like that’s very inethical as a parent, which would be like, oh, okay, well let me accidentally get pregnant, whatever the situation may be, and then have a child. I feel like that’s an inethical situation to bring them into like a very, if there are situations that it’s not fit for a person to live in, including yourself. If you feel like you’re in a situation that’s unfit for YOU, to bring another person into that situation seems very inethical and irresponsible.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

With this response, Brodie seems to understand Liam’s question as something along the lines of, “Is that what you think?”, answering in terms of what he personally believes (line 1), thinks, and feels (lines 4, 6). As the discussion continues, however, Brodie seems to use the term differently, to characterize the quality of his opinion. When asked about which situations he would view as inimical to a good life, he explained:

Transcript 16		
Brodie	What I won't sign my name to is that I agree that that's a probable cause for an abortion. I'm very pro-choice for the first two trimesters. I don't feel like you need a reason that- you don't want to have a child don't have a child. Uh third trimester, I think it has to come down to viability or if it's going to harm or kill the mother. But I don't know if I'm uh willing to sign my name to, oh I wouldn't have a child right now because of climate change, but I do mean that it's something that people have to start asking, is like, what is, what is the environment they're coming into?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Brodie’s use of the term in lines 1 and 5 seems to refer to his uncertainty, as if to say, “I’m not sure I agree.” This might be understood as an example of intra-personal genre interference.

Employing a novel term which had been defined by different group members in various ways,

Brodie’s own usage varies somewhat as he is pulled in different directions by the multiple genres simultaneously at work.

Later in the discussion, Savannah referred to a case she had heard about in which special educators were considering whether or not they should attempt to educate a student who was quadriplegic, blind, deaf, and mute, not knowing how this student could possibly benefit from their efforts. Assuring the rest of the group that she believed that children with conditions like Down syndrome and autism certainly benefit from education and from life more generally, she somewhat hesitantly expressed her opinion that some combination of conditions might make life not worth living:

Transcript 17		
Savannah	If they're not going to benefit, I don't think it's better for them to be? I don't know. That, I- I think that's really kinda- and I think that's, if you know that beforehand, I personally would say it's better off to not be than to have a life. I don't know. That was really- I mean, I do know, I do know, I'll sign my name to that, but it's- it is definitely a personal opinion.	1 2 3 4 5

After backing off of her recognizably controversial statement by saying, “I don’t know,” she self-corrects, saying, “I mean, I do know, I do know, I’ll sign my name to that” (lines 4-5). As I read it, this self-correction stems from a recognition that, in saying “I don’t know,” she was distancing herself from the idea she had articulated, and thus represents a choice to speak answerably. Although she articulates her belief tentatively, acknowledging that it is “definitely a personal opinion,” she ultimately claims it as her own. If my interpretation is accurate, Savannah’s use of the term and practice of name-signing is resonant with the kind of Dialogue I was hoping to cultivate. This is particularly interesting because, in our next meeting, Savannah explained that she was not convinced name-signing was important in group discussions.

Episode 3: Pushing Back

This objection came during our metacognitive reflections, as we were once again reviewing and discussing a portion of transcript. In that context, Savannah said, “I’m starting to feel less, less certain that in group discussion you need to sign your name, even though it’s been pushed by you two,” adding, “But when you’re talking one on one, then placing yourself is really important.” She went on to explain that, “you might get hung up in like the starting a bunch of different little debates if you really focus on like signing your name. But I also think you could say things and mean them without necessarily explicitly signing.” I do not entirely understand the first part of her explanation and I did not pursue it further at the time. She implicitly defines name-signing as “placing yourself,” and suggests that this kind of self-placement, though valuable in one-on-one situations, may be ineffective in group discussions. Perhaps this objection stems from a sense that the purpose of a group discussion is to cover a certain amount of ground, which could very well be in tension with a goal of encountering interlocutors in their particularity. Although we cannot be sure of what precisely she meant, Savannah did expound on her latter comment about explicitness. Referring to the transcript, she said, “there was one point in here where Liam said something like, ‘Uh you’re signing your name to that?’ But we all kinda knew it.” Savannah’s point seems to be that Brodie implicitly endorsed the ideas he was raising—that he would not have brought them up if he did not believe them. Although I had not really considered how explicit name-signing had to be, I agreed in theory that it would be possible to speak answerably without explicitly announcing in each comment that you are speaking as yourself, but I disagreed with Savannah’s assessment of Brodie’s comments. Explaining this, I pushed back, saying that “he’s raising questions saying what people think about this, but hasn’t actually situated himself anywhere, right?...So like, it wasn’t clear to me what

Brodie thought of that.” Savannah responded, “I don't know that I agree with you,” which led to an extended discussion about name-signing in general and that moment in particular.

Brodie began by justifying his approach, arguing that it was more efficient than the alternative:

Transcript 18		
Brodie	I feel like raising it like this, as like, as a question, enabled for, like, more conversation than if I had just said, ‘I believe we need to start asking questions, we need to, people need to start asking if like, having a child is ethically right, or morally right.’ ‘Cause I feel like raising it as a question is a more efficient way to like indulge in conversation rather than me just coming in and making a statement.	1 2 3 4 5

In this comment, Brodie suggests that a statement like “I believe we need to start asking questions...” would have more of a personal signature than what he actually said, which was, “So maybe there has to be this ethical question of what life am I bringing a person into?” (see Transcript 4). Implicitly admitting that he had not signed his name with his comment, he raises the question of whether or not his approach was justifiable, defending it, somewhat like Savannah, in terms of efficiency.

Jane’s response reintroduced the notion of name-signing as an expression of certainty: “I feel like, like this need to sign your name to something kind of defeats the purpose of a lot like in the discussion...like if you're going to sign your name to something why are you discussing it?” This led me to ask her what she meant by “signing your name to something,” and she explained: “it sounds to me like you're saying something is definitive, and like that's my opinion, like that's endgame.” I explained that I understood the term differently, but before I could expound, Liam brought the discussion back to the notion of distance between self and ideas, saying, “It’s also- there's a question how far you- you remove yourself from an argument.” Referring to the transcript, he tried to paraphrase Brodie’s point, saying, “this world is too horrible to bring

children into, or some child- children aren't worth being born, or something like that.” Using this example, he explained:

Transcript 19		
Liam	So that's, that's a pretty strong thing to say. Uh, you could instead ask that as a question, right? You could say, “Are there some cases in which a child, it isn't worth it for a child to be born?” Uh, but you can also go one step further and be like, “So, maybe there has to be this ethical question.” So, like, you're like, maybe there has to be this question, so, like, you can, I mean maybe there's- maybe there's a level where it's, where you're removing yourself too far from it.	1 2 3 4 5 6

The three possibilities Liam suggests for how this idea could be articulated to the group offer a spectrum in which the self is increasingly removed from the idea. While Brodie defended his comment because it was more efficient than the alternative, Liam expressed openness to the possibility that there is something wrong with “removing yourself too far” (line 6) from your ideas. In this moment, Brodie and Liam seem to be using the term similarly, though they disagree about the value of name-signing, but another definition exists alongside the one they are implicitly using, having to do with certainty.

While Liam never discusses name-signing in terms of certainty, it is easy to see how the spectrum he introduced might be understood in those terms, with a straightforward statement indicating the most certainty and a circumlocutionary question the least certain. This is, in fact, how Ted seems to understand it. Following Liam’s comment, Ted says:

Transcript 20		
Ted	Kind of jumping off of what you said, like, if I were to sign my name to everything that I said, everything that I would be saying would be, like, super abstract and super far away from the argument, you know? I might sign my name to utilitarian philosophy, but the moment we start arguing about the implications of utilitarian philosophy then it's like, I'm not gonna like, immediately sign my name to something there, so, for me to sign my name, like I don't really have a lot of beliefs that are, um. Like my beliefs are usually more abstract and the more specific you get the less certain I am.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Ted seems to understand name-signing as having to do with beliefs held with some certainty, which, in Ted’s case, tend to be abstract. With that concept of name-signing, Ted suggests that if he were to sign his name to everything he said in our discussions, his comments would be “super far away from the argument” (lines 2-3). It may be that Ted’s concern is similar to Savannah’s, as both seem to worry about how name-signing would negatively impact the flow of the conversation, though they seem to define the term itself differently (Ted in terms of certainty and Savannah in terms of “placing” oneself).

In response to Ted, I articulated my ethico-ontological perspective, saying, “the way I’ve been thinking about signing your name, it has nothing to do with certainty, or immovability, it’s about being uh, present with the other person.” This comment led to the following exchange:

Transcript 21		
Anand	Yeah. Just a quick question, what would happen if you didn't sign your name to certain things, like what would you say are the negatives of not signing your name?	1 2 3
David	Um... I mean I think you just don't allow the other- the other participants in the dialogue to see you. You know the dialogue becomes less human, because- because you have- you haven't allowed yourself to be in it.	4 5 6
Liam	But humans are fallible, David.	7
David	Indeed.	8

It seems that the value of being present with another person was not apparent to Anand, and I do not know if my explanation was convincing or even comprehensible. Liam certainly was not convinced; his terse comment, “But humans are fallible” (line 7), speaks volumes. Because humans are fallible, Liam is hesitant to anchor the Dialogic ideal to humanization, as he will make explicit in his final paper discussed below.

At this point, our discussion had already extended beyond the established time for an intermission, so I simply said, “Indeed,” and asked if Brodie, who was raising his hand, wanted to share his comment now or after the break. Noting that his comment was “about this,” Brodie took the opportunity to speak, sharing with the group his definition: “I thought of this notion of signing your name to something it was like, I would be okay with someone saying that I said that,” adding that name-signing indicated, “like a confidence, in my opinion, that is like resolute, and like established.” In my mind, there are differences between being willing to be quoted and having a resolute and established confidence relative to some topic, but Brodie conflates them here, perhaps inadvertently or perhaps because he would be uncomfortable being quoted with regards to something he was not confident about.

With this concept of name-signing, Brodie referred to the moment in the transcript we had been discussing, and said:

Transcript 22		
Brodie	Like, sometimes like I wanna raise questions when I don't have an opinion on them necess-, like a fully formed one at least. And I think that's what I did on this one specifically, like, I didn't know I had an- what my opinion was when I was raising the question, I just thought the question was interesting. So that's, like, signing my- signing your name is like, it's great because it lets us argue and discuss with each other, but like, also when you gotta sign your name to everything then there's no longer form for questions because the question inherently lacks a sense of confidence.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

In this comment, Brodie seems most inclined to understand name-signing in terms of confidence (line 8) and having a “fully formed” opinion (line 2)—separable but understandably associated ideas—but his comment that “signing your name is...great because it lets us argue and discuss with each other” (lines 5-6) may suggest a different understanding having to do with speaking as ourselves. Reiterating once again that I understood the term differently, not as indicative of

confidence or certainty, I made the following comment, and then dismissed the class for its five-minute break:

Transcript 23		
David	I will use a different term to say, being present as your authentic self in the conversation and allowing people to see where you stand. Uh, and it's okay to ask questions, right, say, "I'm not entirely sure about this. What do you think about that?" Um, you can be authentic and present and still ask questions. The important thing is not removing yourself from the conversation.	1 2 3 4 5

Within the group and even within individual group members, multiple concepts of name-signing with various evaluations were simultaneously at play, shaped by our different senses of the discussion genre we were participating in.

Episode 4: Invoking Name-Signing in Discussion 2

During the following week’s discussion about physician-assisted suicide (PAS), name-signing was invoked twice, once by me and once by Brodie. Responding to a prevalent assumption that individuals are the ultimate authority concerning when their own life is (not) worth living, I said the following:

Transcript 24		
David	I am open to some form of PAS, but I also wonder about that. If like, am I really the best judge of when life is worth living? And I guess I'm coming at that from two perspectives. One is a religious perspective, where I feel like my life is not my own entirely in that it's partially God's. And there might be something for me to learn in life even when I consider it to be miserable, and therefore worth continuing. But even not from a religious perspective, from just a social perspective, I think my life is not my own in the sense that maybe like Savannah was saying, even if it's miserable for me, it might be worthwhile for someone else to have me here. So again, the only thing I can sign my name to is that I don't know what to do in this situation. I think it's complicated. I think there are good reasons to have physician assisted suicide. At the same time, I wonder about that. If we really are the best judges, or if the individual should be the one, or the only one who gets to make that choice.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

Despite my repeated distinctions between my concept of name-signing and how others were using it, my usage of the term in line 9 seems to echo others' concepts of name-signing as having to do with commitment to a given position, as if to say, "I am not willing to commit to anything other than the fact that I am unsure about this." Interestingly, however, my comment as a whole evinces a willingness to speak as myself and to reveal aspects of myself to my interlocutors, and I render myself addressable not simply as someone who has mixed feelings about PAS, but relative to the reasons, religious and otherwise, that underly those mixed feelings. This might be understood as a kind of genre interference that emerges between my use of the term and my practice. Although I was speaking answerably, figuratively signing my name, I used the term to refer to something else.

Responding shortly thereafter and articulating an opposing perspective, Brodie said:

Transcript 25		
Brodie	The point remains, whether or not we agree that a choice is good or bad, we essentially- the idea that we still have it, I feel like is the importance of agency. Because, and maybe this is more than likely my own opinion and I'll sign my name to that, I believe that the sanctity of life is interpersonal. And that it is introspective that I have to give my life sanctity, rather than somebody else or some other entity giving my life sanctity. But in that relies the fact that I could commit suicide if I wanted to, but I choose not to. These people deserve that choice, is how I would say it.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Brodie's use of the term in lines 3-4 seems similar to mine, as if to say, "I'm willing to stand by this idea." Although he provides less personal context for his opinion than I do, he takes a clear stand, making himself addressable as someone who believes that each individual determines the sanctity of their own life and, therefore, ought to have the ability to determine when to end their life.

Episode 5: Reflecting on Name-Signing

In their final papers for the class, Savannah, Liam, and Brodie all referred to name-signing, though Savannah did not use the term. The prompt for the paper was quite broad, simply inviting students to reflect on the semester and articulate their own working theory about how best to go about communicating across differences, so it is notable that these students chose to discuss name-signing. However—and this will not be surprising to readers of this chapter—they continue to use the term and evaluate the concept/practice in disparate ways.

Writing in her paper that “your main goal as a conversationist should be to find the human in your opposite and maintain respect for both them and their ideas” (p. 2), Savannah discussed how this goal could be reached through practices she termed listening, speaking to complexity, and maintaining humanity. In the final section, echoing some of our discussion of name-signing, she writes that it is important to “make sure you maintain yourself in your discussion. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that your opinions do, in fact, belong to you” (p. 10). In illustration of this idea, Savannah records the following anecdote:

Transcript 26		
Savannah	The other day, I was having a conversation with my friend B. He is a devout Catholic while I have no religion at all. As we were talking I mentioned that I believed religion to be a personal experience. He responded by saying “It is a typical American new age belief to think that religion is...”. I stopped him and said, “No, I’m saying that this is MY opinion, not a ‘typical American’s’. Please respect it like it is what I feel, not like you are talking about a group of people”. He apologized, and we continued talking. This led to me feeling far more respected as an individual, by my own doing. This will not always be this obvious, but making sure that your ideas come across as your own in whatever way necessary for you will be extremely helpful for following through on the other parts of effective dialogue. When you feel like you are being heard, it is far easier to converse respectfully.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Despite explicitly pushing back against the notion of name-signing earlier, Savannah’s reflection here suggests that she believes in speaking—and being heard—as oneself. In the discussion genre she is describing, the practice of maintaining your own humanity and speaking as a unique person is valuable because it facilitates respectful conversation. The fact that she does not explicitly refer to name-signing is interesting and may be an artifact of the genre interference I have documented above. With the variety of meanings associated with name-signing, perhaps it was simplest to use another term.

Liam also continued to grapple with name-signing, reiterating some of the concerns he raised earlier in our meetings in his final paper. He writes:

Transcript 27		
Liam	I am still not sure about the degree to which one should sign their name to things.	1
	There is a value in revealing what positions you stand by in a conversation so that	2
	the other side knows what perspective you are coming from. On the one hand, if	3
	my interlocutor reveals that he supports a position that I personally despise I may	4
	become more hostile and vice-versa. A further disadvantage of signing your name	5
	to something is that it is a public and private commitment to some belief. You may	6
	feel outwardly pressured to stay consistent on a topic, an issue that politicians	7
	suffer from in an extreme way. Signing your name to something also has internal	8
	implications. You could be stating that you believe something even though in your	9
	mind you weren’t a hundred percent sure about the issue. Once formed, a belief is	10
	more difficult to change, so expressing an attachment to a view can make it harder	11
	to change it afterward. Also, if the discussion focuses more on what people think	12
	than on the ideas themselves, the discussion could become more personal and less	13
	about the subject at hand. As I have stated, the main goal of talking across	14
	differences is to find the truth and focusing on people rather than ideas is worse at	15
	achieving this goal.	16

In this excerpt, Liam implicitly defines name-signing as “revealing what positions you stand by” (line 2), making a “a public and private commitment to some belief” (line 6), and “expressing an attachment to a view” (line 11). For Liam, the problem with name-signing qua revealing a committed belief is that it might impede the search for truth by provoking hostility between interlocutors, obstructing change, and distracting from the subject at hand. Operating within the

paradigm of a discussion genre centered on finding abstract truth (line 15), the value of name-signing is dubious.

As opposed to Liam, who most explicitly defended name-signing but ended up rejecting it, Brodie, who most often questioned the value of name-signing, ended up endorsing it in his final paper. However, consistent with the patterns outlined above, Brodie’s comments, reflecting some of his characteristic verbosity, suggest a variety of possible meanings of the term:

Transcript 28		
Brodie	The most introspective component to communicating across differences is the ability to be precise in your opinions. As we have talked about throughout the class, the idea of signing your name to something may be frightening but is necessary to more effectively argue. The cruciality of this is that so often we will speak to vague opinions which exist in the world, so rather than argue and discuss why we feel some way we, as people, choose to hide in anonymity. This anonymity neglects the importance of human relationships and strips many arguments of their intricacy. I struggled with this in this setting as I often found myself arguing against vague existences rather than addressing points in the room. Specifically, during the abortion discussion I was asked to refrain from addressing conservatives as a whole and more specifically people in the room, “It’s like I see conservatives doing this and I’m wondering if, uh that relates to anyone here?” David asked me here if my discussion was relevant to anyone in the room which based on my point, it was not. This highlights my inability to address points made in the room, which speaks to the lack of precision in my arguments. My inability to be precise in my arguments lead to issues of confusion and hinders the ability of the discussion to be humanized. If I choose to argue against the individuals in the room, I allow the discussion to be between humans rather than ideas. To be able to operate with the other two necessities which I have outlined you must engage in precise arguments rather than conceptual, abstract opinions. The difficult reality of human relationships requires a sense of shared emotion and experience but choosing to engage in precise arguments are the most effective way to argue as seen by the real conversations our group have had.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

What might we conclude about the discussion genre(s) Brodie is implicitly influenced by and participating in? He never directly states what he believes the ultimate telos of a discussion to be, but he refers repeatedly to effective argumentation (lines 4, 23) and to human relationships (lines 7, 17, 19, 21). Although it may be that these ideals cohere in some way, it is also possible to read

them as one final manifestation of genre interference. Pulled in two directions, Brodie's written reflections on the meaning and value of name-signing exists in tension between two genres of d/Dialogue, one focused on effective argumentation, the other on humanity.

As I understand it, Brodie intends the term not so much as having to do with making ourselves present to each other, but with how we ought to address our interlocutors. In describing his struggle to sign his name during discussions, he suggests that the ideal is to respond to "points in the room" rather than "vague existences" (lines 9-10) such that the discussion takes place "between humans rather than ideas" (lines 19-20). The description is riddled with tensions. For example, while ventriloquating me, he suggests that the problem was that he was not addressing "people in the room" (line 11). However, when referring to this later, he revises the phrase to "points made in the room" (line 15). Although he seems drawn to the importance of relating to his interlocutors in a humane way, he is simultaneously pulled toward the ideational plane in which people are primarily point-makers and their points are what ultimately matter.

Interfering Genres

Although these tensions are perhaps most evident in Brodie's discourse, they were present throughout our time together (and more broadly). Encountering each other not in a vacuum but within a milieu of extant and emerging genres, we navigated among their sometimes conflicting pulls, figuring out, in dialogue with each other, what exactly we were doing together. As I have suggested above, by tracing how we responded to the concept/practice of name-signing, and specifically the moments of what I have called genre interference, we glimpse something of the quality of the genres that were informing and influencing our discussions. In Table 11 below, I synthesize these genres, illustrating how different definitions and evaluations of name-signing were operative among the members of Group 1. Because not every student

explicitly and fully articulated their understandings of name-signing and beliefs about discussions, some of this is speculative. I present it here as a data-inspired sketch which captures something of the shape of its object but is not intended to definitively capture it.

Table 11: Various Genres of Discussion Simultaneously at Play

Speaker	Meaning of Name-Signing	Value of Name-Signing	Telos of Discussion
Brodie ¹	Confidently asserting established opinions	<i>Questionable</i> : Not always efficient, and no room for questions.	Persuasion
Brodie ²	Precision in argumentation	<i>Positive</i> : Effective and humanizing.	Persuasion
David	Standing somewhere/speaking as self/not distancing self from ideas	<i>Positive</i> : Engenders encounters between unique individuals.	Dialogic relations
Jane	Certainty	<i>Questionable</i> : Precludes change.	Idea-development and human progress
Liam	Public commitment; revealing your position to interlocutors	<i>Questionable</i> : Can increase hostility and pressure toward consistency.	Pursuit of truth
Savannah ¹	Explicitly placing yourself	<i>Questionable</i> : Inefficient and unnecessary.	?
Savannah ²	To own one's ideas, to speak as a unique individual and not simply as part of a collective	<i>Positive</i> : Helps interlocutors feel heard and respected.	Cultivate harmony and respect
Ted	Certainty	<i>Questionable</i> : Makes discussion about concrete issues impossible.	?

What becomes evident in considering the sketch above is that, although we came together to discuss polarizing issues, we had a variety of ideas about what that meant, ideas which influenced the ways we understood, evaluated, and took up the concept/practice of name-signing. It is also evident that, at least in some cases, these understandings, evaluations, and practices were dynamic, changing in response to our discussions and metacommunicative reflections (and any number of other things).

Cultivating Looping for Understanding

There are many differences between the students in Group 1, those considered in the previous section, and Group 3, who will be considered in this section. In addition to the demographic differences (see Chapter 3), students in Group 3 seemed less interested in our metacommunicative reflections and in conceptualizing the Dialogic ideal. I do not know to what extent this is due to their cognitive development, socialization/education, etc., but the result is that I have less explicit data about these things with this younger group of students. However, in tracing the trajectory of the concept/practice of looping for understanding, there is still evidence of the genres that were shaping their utterances and resisting alteration. In this section, I first provide an overview of my attempts to cultivate the practice of looping for understanding and then consider more explicitly the nature of the genre interference we experienced.

I originally introduced the concept/practice of looping for understanding to Group 3 during our third meeting together (2/4), though I did not use that term. In my review of our discussion about abortion the day before, I noticed that students had never asked clarifying questions, tending instead to respond to each other with statements of opinion, often in terms of “I think” or “I feel” and “I agree.” Wanting to encourage them to listen more carefully to each other, as I framed the upcoming discussion, I said the following:

Transcript 29		
David	I wanted just to invite you to do one thing this time, that we didn't really do last time. So when you're responding to someone, I want you to try to, uh, first, understand them. So say something like, "Aliyah, if I've understood, you're saying, yada yada yada. Is that right?" And then, after you've said that, then move on to your point. Okay? So, I want you to try to do that, um again, that's not, like we said at the beginning, that's not always the right thing to do. But it's something you should be able to do, and something you should do sometimes.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

As I explained to the students, I did not believe that looping for understanding was always the right to do, but I wanted students to be familiar enough with it that it would become a part of their discursive repertoire. As the discussion began, Patience shared her opinion about abortion and I explicitly demonstrated for the students what I wanted them to try to do, reflecting back to Patience what I had heard her say. As the discussion continued, I prompted the group to try this kind of reflective listening, and I coached a few of them through it. However, despite my efforts, with only one exception, the students did not take up the practice unless I explicitly asked them to do so. Assuming that the reason for this lack to uptake was simply that looping for understanding was unfamiliar and uncomfortable, in our next meeting (2/5), I took a more heavy-handed approach, requesting that we each take turns practicing the move. Explaining this to the students, I said:

Transcript 30		
David	Um, so I wanted to, uh, to practice that idea that I brought up yesterday of restating what the other people say before we, um, express our opinion. Um, and instead of, so this, today is going to feel a little different because instead of just having a kind of free-flowing open conversation, it's going to be really structured. 'Kay, so what will happen is, I'll say something and then we're going to go around in a circle and so, Aliyah who sits next to me will restate my, my opinion, whatever I said, and then she'll ask me is that- did I understand it. And then if I say, yes, then it's her turn...Okay and then Graciella will restate her opinion, make sure that Aliyah says, "Yes, you've understood me correctly," and then it will be her turn and so we'll go around like that. So again this will feel really different. It's not going to be a normal sort of conversation. We're just practicing this, uh, this uh, you know, this move. This thing you could do in a conversation where you really try to listen to what they're saying, say it back to them and then add your part.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

The students complied with this structure, though, as I will explain, they still struggled somewhat to loop for understanding as I intended, generally failing to ask if their understanding was accurate without my prompting.

In my post-session memo, I wrote that the activity was “[e]ffective in the sense that everyone showed that they can do it [i.e., looping for understanding]. But it felt very different. Kind of dead. People were just waiting their turn.” When I asked the students the following day what they thought about the activity, they had a similar reaction, indicating agreement with Patience, who said, “I didn’t like it...It was boring.” For me, this experience encapsulates a basic tension I felt in seeking to pedagogically cultivate Dialogue. On the one hand, I wanted to make our discussions more Dialogic and I had some idea of the dimensions along which I wanted changes to be made. On the other hand, by pushing too hard to encourage a certain discursive practice, the discussion seems to lose its dialogicality. Paradoxically, the moment Dialogue is obligatory, it becomes impossible.

Sensing this tension, I developed an approach that, I hoped, would help students adjust their responses along the dimensions of Dialogue without losing the dialogicality of a free-flowing discussion. I printed a series of cards, each of which prompted students to do something with Dialogic potential and I distributed one card to each student. I did not require students to do the action described in their card, but I hoped the cards would remind them, in the flow of the discussion, some of the options available to them. I suggested that once students had done the action their card suggests they could exchange the card for a new one. During some of the discussions, I assigned certain point values to different cards and gave students awards for the points they earned. One of the cards was “Loop for Understanding,” which provided instructions and two examples of how to do this (see Figure 5).

Of all the cards, Loop for Understanding, Learn More, and Invite Others were the least commonly used, so I often said that they were worth twice as many points as the other cards in order to incentivize students to try them out. During our meta-communicative reflections on February 25, 2020, I showed students a video of part of a previous discussion in which I felt we had missed an opportunity to ask a follow-up question after Derya articulated a rather ambiguous idea. After watching the clip, we practiced looping for understanding, as if we were revising our previous responses to Derya.

Figure 5: Reminder Card Example

Loop for Understanding

Before explaining what you think, really make sure you've understood what the other person is trying to say. One way to do this is to restate their idea to them and double check that you got it right.

Examples:

- So you're saying that _____. Did I understand that right?
- I'm hearing you say _____. Would you add anything to that?

The following day (2/26/2020), when we were about to begin our discussions about toxic masculinity, I handed out the cards. Upon reading his card, Luis said, with a tone indicating some concern, "Oh wow. Loop for understanding. Wow." Despite his apparent trepidation, Luis went on to loop for understanding after one of Aliyah's comments, as recorded below:

Transcript 31		
Aliyah	Toxic masculinity is a really tr-...I think it's...there's a lot of it in society. Like, for example, my...um...my friend, he is...um...he has a, like a, soft voice, like a...and naturally guys are supposed to have deep voices, and...um...he has a very soft voice, so people think automatically that he's gay and stuff. [David: Mm-hmm.] But he's not, so...I don't like the fact that people think that all guys have to have deep voices, and like...'cause they don't, I mean...we all...like everybody's gonna go through puberty at different times, so like, yeah.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
David	Mm-hmm. So you feel like...um...does he get made fun of, or?	8
Aliyah	Yeah.	9
David	Yeah?	10
Aliyah	Like he, like people think he's gay, but he's not.	11
David	Mm. Mm.	12

Luis	So what you're saying is that people think that men should have deep voices, and not soft voices?	13 14
Aliyah	Yeah, which I think is like...toxic masculinity, 'cause like...it's...I mean it's all...it's natural for some people...I mean it's natural for- they think like...like...we've, we've gone...we've lived in a society where people think all guys have to have deep voices, but it's not natural for some guys. Some guys haven't gone through puberty yet...some- like it's not natural for a lot of guys, so...yeah.	15 16 17 18 19 20

While we might question the quality of Luis’ question, which feels rather forced and formulaic, it provides Aliyah an opportunity to expound on her comment and further work through her ideas (e.g., revising her initial assertion that “naturally guys are supposed to have deep voices,” line 3, with “it’s not natural for a lot of guys,” lines 20-21).

Although not all students voluntarily looped for understanding during our discussions, it was evident from students’ journal entries and comments in class that they were aware of the concept/practice and had some sense of wanting to do it better. In Table 12 below, I have transcribed students’ responses to a broad prompt I regularly gave students which invited them to reflect on what they would like to do differently in subsequent discussions.

Table 12: Student Reflections on Looping for Understanding

Adriana (2/26)	“I can try to restate the other persons ideas, then say mine it might be better.”
Derya (3/10)	“One thing I want to try to improve is talking more and try understanding what others think.”
Graciella (3/10)	“I can improve by talking more and understand what others are saying.”
Noemi (3/10)	“I think I can improve on listening so that then I can re-state what the person said before. Also on loop for understanding.”

I will not seek to fully argue this point, but I believe that using these cards was a useful intervention in that it helped students to make discursive moves that they might not otherwise

have done while also maintaining both the flow of the discussion and student agency. As the facilitator, I felt that the conversation was interesting and lively, and students seemed to enjoy using the cards. Aliyah, for example, commented in her journal, “I honestly wouldn’t change the game because I think it’s pretty fun” (2/26/2020). Additionally, there is evidence that the cards helped students to make certain discursive moves. One rather rough way to gauge this is to consider the number of lines of clarifying questions asked during the discussions: Before introducing the cards, students asked around one line of clarifying questions per discussion that I did not explicitly invite, while I asked around six per discussion. While using the cards, the number of students’ lines of clarifying questions that were not explicitly invited doubled and mine decreased, both to around two per discussion. I do not take this as absolute evidence that the discussions became more Dialogic partly because I do not believe that Dialogue is reducible to certain forms of speech. For my purposes here, I simply intend to show how I sought to cultivate looping for understanding and to demonstrate that the concept/practice was recognized and taken up to some degree by the students. Further claims about the effectiveness of the intervention or the Dialogic quality of the discussions are beyond the scope of this paper, though I think they are interesting and worthwhile directions to pursue.

Interfering Genres

Although students recognized and took up the concept/practice of looping for understanding, as with Group 1 and name-signing, we experienced a certain amount of genre interference in the process. By introducing concepts/practices such as looping for understanding, I was suggesting that we change the genre of our discussions, however slightly, and these moments of friction reveal something of the nature of the genre(s) that were at work in the group, informing and impinging on our d/Dialogue. For these high school freshmen, genre interference

relative to looping for understanding was manifest primarily in two ways: 1) generally not doing it without explicit prompting, and 2) restating another’s opinion without asking them to confirm that understanding.

Consider the following exchange, referenced above, which took place on the day I originally introduced the concept/practice of looping for understanding to the group (2/4). After my explanation, Patience began our discussion, saying:

Transcript 32		
Patience	I feel like if, if like, if a woman were to get raped or something, and end up getting pregnant, and like she can't, she can't afford her child, she can't afford to live for her child, she doesn't have a good enough job to support her child, she has the right to get an abortion, and no one has a say in it. Because it's her body, and it's her choice, and it's her life.	1 2 3 4 5
David	Mm-hmm. So, I'm going to demonstrate the kind of thing that I want you to try this time. So, Patience, what I hear you saying is, uh, if the woman doesn't have the money to take care of the baby after it's born, she should be able to have the abortion. Is that right?	6 7 8 9
Patience	Mm-hmm.	10
David	Mm-hmm. Yeah, interesting.	11
Aliyah	I agree with Patience. And also, adding on to that, I don't think a woman should have to, that got raped, should have to have a child, um, because maybe they don't- Um, I mean, obviously they wouldn't want to have to have a child with the father being somebody that hurt them. Like, you know, that just hurt them? So, they wouldn't want that. And then, they wouldn't want their child to have, to live without their father, not knowing their father, or- Some- some day you're going to have to tell your child this is what happened, and then, she doesn't want to have to go through that, so she shouldn't have to.	12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19
David	Can someone restate that back to Aliyah?...And let me just say, I know this is, it feels a little funny to do this, but I think it's important.	20 21
Patience	I agree, because-	22
David	Before you go on to why you agree, I want us to try to restate what Aliyah just said. Can anyone try?	23 24
Derya	Like explain again like what she's trying to say?	25

David	Mm-hmm.	26
Derya	Basically, what she's trying to say is that if you got raped and, you don't like, basically what I tried to say last time, if you don't feel comfortable having the chil- having the child with someone who, like, basically hurt you, or raped you, um, then it's your choice. And if you don't want to have the child, you don't have to have the child.	27 28 29 30 31
David	So, then ask Aliyah if that's right. Did you-	32
Derya	Was that right? (<i>laughs</i>)	33
Aliyah	Yeah (<i>laughs</i>)	34
David	Mm-hmm. Was there anything else you- you would add to that?	35
Aliyah	Um, and like she wouldn't want, like, like I said, she wouldn't want her child to live in a life where she knows, they know that their father is, raped their mother. Because one day she's going to have to tell them. [David: Mm-hmm.] So, yeah.	36 37 38 39

My demonstration of the practice in lines 6-9 is certainly not ideal, especially in the way it simplifies Patience's multifaceted comment to a single consideration. Of course, she might have taken the opportunity to expound, but, perhaps due to my authority as the teacher/facilitator, she accepts my simplistic summary. As the conversation continues, it is apparent that looping for understanding does not come naturally to the students, at least in the context of our discussions (i.e., as part of the genre). In this episode, for example, Patience moves immediately to express her agreement (line 22), even when explicitly prompted to restate Aliyah's comment, and, later, Derya does not initially seek to confirm the accuracy of her restatement with Aliyah (lines 27-31), seeming to assume that she had already understood. The laughter in lines 33-34 suggests something of the awkwardness Derya and Aliyah seem to feel; this is not the kind of thing they are accustomed to doing in classroom discussions.

Similar dynamics were evident the following day (2/5), when I took a more heavy-handed approach, requiring students to loop for understanding before sharing their own ideas

about abortion. The following exchange begins after Derya confirmed that she had understood Graciella's comment and records four subsequent occasions for looping for understanding. I think it captures the essence of this day, complete with Brandin dozing off out of boredom (line 7) and students' recurring struggles to refer their paraphrases to the original author.

Transcript 33		
Derya	My opinion is still the same. If you do- if- it's always the woman's choice. That's, that's, um, yeah.	1 2
Luis	<i>(Looking at David)</i> Mmm, I add to 'em?	3
David	So first, summarize what she said, restate her point.	4
Luis	Mmm, well she said that her point was still the same. It's the woman's choice. <i>(Looks at Derya, who nods)</i>	5 6
David	Devin you awake? <i>(laughter)</i> So you're going to have to restate Luis, so listen carefully.	7 8
Luis	I mean I'm in the middle. I really don't know. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad. It's just a hard choice for each woman. I'm really stuck.	9 10
David	Do you mind saying a little about how you- like what things you think about as you're... 'cause I feel like I'm in a similar place right, like I'm pulled in both directions.	11 12 13
Luis	If a woman gets raped she could abort the baby 'cause it wasn't her fault. So, that's kind of like a good thing 'cause I mean it's not her baby. But sometimes, um, if some people abort their babies when it's actually theirs and they didn't get raped. So, sometimes it's a good thing, sometimes it's a bad thing and I don't know which way to go.	14 15 16 17 18
Brandin	He's saying, like, it's 50/50. Like sometimes, he won't, sometimes it's necessary to abort, sometimes it's not. But, me, I mean-	19 20
David	So, first Luis, is that accurate?	21
Carlos	<i>(Nods)</i> Mm-hmm.	22
David	Would you add anything to it? [Luis: <i>shakes head</i>] Okay all right, Brandin.	23
Brandin	Me, uh, I mean, if you get raped or something, you got the right to abort your baby or whatever, 'cause I mean 'cause [it's not no human being yet, just like a seal or something.] I mean, but if you like in a relationship with somebody and	24 25 26

	then y'all weren't planning to have a baby but boom and pop and you wanna abort it, I mean, you should just keep it because I mean you know what you was doing, so. [David: Mm-hmm.] Yeah.	27 28 29
David	Okay. Cody?	30
Cody	I agree with what, what Brandin was saying if you were like, a girl is raped it should be allowed but like if you were in a relationship and it happened, like they should just go through with it.	31 32 33
David	Is that right Brandin? [Brandin: <i>nods</i>] Okay, Cody.	34
Cody	And I have, um, I'm 50/50 on it. I feel like if you were saying, like, if a girl gets raped like they should have the option to or not to but if it was like if you're in a relationship then even if it was like on purpose or accident, like you should still just, um, go through with it because it's not like if you're not being raped or anything, I don't see the point in getting rid of it.	35 36 37 38 39
David	Can you summarize that?	40
Patience	What Cody is saying is that, if...dang, my mind just went blank. Um, Cody's saying that he, he feel 50/50 on it, if it's, if it's not your fault basically then you have the right to get rid of it. But you know, you like in a relationship and you, you know, then you should have the baby. Is that what you said?	41 42 43 44
Cody	Mm-hmm.	45

Luis' question after Derya's comment, "Mmm, I add to 'em?" (line 4) suggests both that, despite having had several examples of looping for understanding immediately beforehand, he is unsure of what to do, and that his initial inclination is to "add to" her comments rather than to restate them. This is similar to Cody's response to Brandin, which he begins with "I agree" (line 32). In both of these cases, the students imply that there is something unusual about summarizing their peer's comments—the first half of looping for understanding.

The second half, asking the peer to endorse your summary, likewise did not seem to come naturally to students. In this exchange, for example, Brandin and Cody both fail to run their summaries past the original authors; in both instances, I do it for them (lines 21-24 and 35). The fact that Patience (verbally) and Luis (nonverbally) do this without my help suggests that

Brandin’s and Cody’s response is not simply attributable to unclear directions on my part. At the same time, I am struck by my use of the words “summarize” and “restate” when instructing students about what I expect them to do (lines 4, 7, 41). Although I have repeatedly demonstrated that I would like students to ask a question following their paraphrase of their peers’ comments, in my instructions here, I only refer explicitly to the first half of looping for understanding. This reminds me that, while we are all undoubtedly building on the foundation of extant discussion genres, we are also in the process of co-constructing what we are doing together, and the words I use to prompt certain responses are consequential. As I have suggested previously, the Dialogic quality of our discussions derives from the dialogic ensemble, not as a result of any single participants’ contributions. We are all responsible.

Three sessions later (2/19), after handing out and reviewing the cards, I briefly introduced the topic of discussion (immigration to the USA), and the following exchange took place:

Transcript 34		
Cody	I feel like there should be, like, some kind of rules. Like, if they have papers, to see those papers to see if they- wherever they're coming from, they don't have criminal history. See, like, what their jobs were or whatnot. Like, it wouldn't be that good if they just came in with nothing, not knowing, like, who- no one knowing who they are. So I sh- feel there should be a little bit borders on that.	1 2 3 4 5
Aliyah	So you're saying that, um, there should be rules like if the person has papers or not or if they have criminal history, or criminal records from their other country. Did I understand that right?	6 7 8
Cody	Yeah. Honestly, it's like, they should have that. It's just like, sort of an idea to like, if they wanna be more safe about immigration, like, letting other people in. But...yeah.	9 10 11

Beyond distributing the cards, I did not solicit this response. My sense is that Aliyah simply enjoyed the “game” with the cards and was not necessarily interested in Cody’s thinking, but nonetheless, she chose to loop for understanding, providing Cody with an opportunity to

expound on his initial comment (e.g., explicitly mentioning the notion of increased safety) in addition to demonstrating her understanding to him.

Although looping for understanding had entered the group’s discursive repertoire, moments like the one transcribed above were rather rare, and I routinely intervened to help group members hear and heed each other’s ideas. One example is from the following excerpt one of our discussions about toxic masculinity on March 10, 2020. As a prompt for this discussion, I had shown the students a picture of my two-year-old son and asked them what they would tell him about what it means to be male.

Transcript 35		
Derya	I'd tell my, like if I had a future son or if I, if I was to give advice to someone and I, I just told them to be their self and what makes you a man is loyalty. And just being honest, being truthful. No matter what you wanna be, or who you wanna be, it doesn't make you less of a man. And that goes for any job, if you wanna do makeup, if you wanna go model, if you wanna do this, if you wanna do that. It doesn't, I wouldn't, I'm gonna, I'm gonna say don't listen to social media, don't listen to what others say because a man can be his self.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Aliyah	Like, I kinda like agree with you but I don't at the same time. Like, like there are, like, I was on Instagram one time and like, they were like, this guy was like, "Why do people have a problem with guys wearing makeup and stuff?" And like, everybody was going, like getting like, there were some people getting mad at him, and there's some people going for it, like they're like yeah, like, and then he was wearing makeup and I was like, no.	8 9 10 11 12 13
Derya	That’s why I said it should- don’t listen to what others’ think, don’t listen to social media. I didn’t s- like, that’s- I know what you mean, I know what you’re trying to say, but that’s the advice I’d give to someone is don’t listen to what others say.	14 15 16 17
David	What- what do you think she's trying to say?	18
Derya	I think what she's trying to say is that, um, people make comments on what like, when guys wear makeup or some, like something like that. And I guess, they feel some type of way or you're, I don't know.	19 20 21
David	Is that what you were saying?	22
Graciella	I feel like-	23

David	Let's let-	24
Aliyah	I feel like guys should not wear makeup. Like, if I see one of my brothers wearing makeup, and then they still said like, like if I see one of my brothers wearing makeup, I'd be like-	25 26 27
Derya	[Yeah, that would make you less of a man, yeah.]	28 29
Aliyah	Yeah, I would feel- Yeah I'd be like, like what are you doing?	30

In this exchange, both Aliyah and Derya seem to assume that they have understood each other when that may not have been the case. This is especially evident in Derya's assertion, "I know what you mean" (line 16), following Aliyah's rather ambiguous comment. However, when I ask Derya to actually articulate what she thought Aliyah was saying, she eventually admits some uncertainty (line 22), but does not loop back to Aliyah. Filling this gap, I ask, "Is that what you were saying?" (line 23) and, after I stop Graciella from chiming in, Aliyah makes her opinion more explicit (and herself differently addressable), stating directly, "I feel like guys should not wear makeup" (line 26).

It is evident across the examples recorded in this section that looping for understanding did not come naturally to the students in the context of our discussions. As I have suggested, one way to understand this perpetual challenge to cultivate Dialogue, and specifically looping for understanding, is "genre interference"—the way extant genres influence our practice and impinge on our disposition to respond to each other more Dialogically. Although the students' various senses of the kind of thing we were doing together were unique and dynamic, the fact that they responded to my efforts to cultivate looping for understanding in similar ways suggests that their sense of the genre of classroom discussions was rather entrenched and, thus, exerted a strong influence on what we did together. I have argued that the genre interference we encountered took two primary forms: 1) generally not looping for understanding without being

explicitly asked to do so, and 2) neglecting the second half of looping for understanding (i.e., confirming one's understanding of another's comment with that person). Given this pattern of resistance, what might we infer about the entrenched genres, specifically regarding how they predispose interlocutors to attend and respond to each other? Most basically, it seems to generally discourage students from asking each other questions. The teacher/facilitator is the question-asker. (This was certainly the case for me. Although I intended to model for students the kinds of things they might do in our discussions, it is possible that I inadvertently perpetuated the sense that it was the teacher's role to ask questions, reinforcing rather than resisting the genres of classroom discussion students were familiar with.) With the teacher/facilitator as questioner, the students' role is to answer those questions and to offer their own opinions, adding on to and indicating their (dis)agreement with what others have said. The goal seems to be that students take turns sharing their own, thematically related ideas.

If we take the above as a rough sketch of the genre(s) of classroom discussions that were influencing students' responses to each other, it makes sense that they would not be inclined to practice looping for understanding; such a thing is antithetical to what it means, in that paradigm, to participate in a classroom discussion.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this section, I want to bring together the concepts and frameworks I have introduced and employed in the previous chapters and demonstrate how they can be brought together to understand and reimagine a given moment of interaction. I hope that this will prove useful both theoretically and practically. First, a brief review:

In my theoretical framework, I argued that, at any given moment, an ethical response to the Other consists of some combination of answerability, our obligation to speak from our unique perspective as ourselves; responsiveness, our obligation to attend carefully and respond dynamically to the Other; and capacitation, our obligation to render each other capable of further and better responses. These interrelated “dimensions of Dialogue” sensitize us to the ethical qualities and potential of an interaction, helping us see different ways in which, in our search for truth, our self-Other relationships might be “trued.”

In the first data chapter, I suggested that interlocutors’ presence in the discussion is a function of how they render themselves addressable and how they are addressed—that they are not present but *presenced* in the discussion. This idea is premised on Bakhtin’s dialogic worldview in which the world and our places in it are not given but are always already in the process of being dialogically authored. By responding to each other Dialogically—by truing our relationship—we can tap latent potential within each other and open possibilities of relational becoming. Approaching the transcripts of our discussions from this perspective, I found that the presencing I documented was often rather non-Dialogic: interlocutors often made themselves addressable in ways that seem somewhat unanswerable and addressed each other in ways that do not seem particularly responsive, rendering each other capable of only certain kinds of responses, including silence. Put bluntly, the world we were jointly co-authoring in the discussion was

rather constrained. While there were moments of vulnerability and vitality, by and large, we tended to approach each other guardedly, as if our interlocutors were somewhat dangerous or antagonistic.

In light of the second data chapter, these tendencies can be seen as responses to extant discussion genres—fields of meaning-making that perpetuate and are perpetuated by certain kinds of interactions when people come together to have a discussion. In my analysis in that chapter, I suggest that our sense of the “kind of thing” we were doing influenced how we understood and took up certain concepts/practices with Dialogic potential. Characterizing moments of friction in how we responded to these concepts/practices as “genre interference,” I argued that it was not simply the lack of specific skills that prevented us from entering more fully into Dialogue, but our sense of the “kind of thing” we were supposed to be doing in these discussions. Our various senses of the nature and purpose of a discussion predisposed us to respond in certain ways and not in others—and those responses, in turn, influenced, however slightly, our sense of the discussion genre, at least inasmuch as it related to this particular discussion group.

One way to articulate the relationships between the concepts in these chapters is to say that “relational becoming” coevolves with what we could call “*generic*⁷ becoming.” Who we become together is dialogically related to our various senses of the genre(s) at play in a given interaction. The identities of neither the interlocutors nor the genres are entirely given and settled; both are always already in the process of being re-co-authored⁸.

⁷ I do not intend this to mean “unspecific,” but rather “having to do with genre.” To avoid confusion, I will use italics to mark that the term is being used with this particular meaning.

⁸ This is not to say that the processes of change are identical at both levels. Changes to genres and changes to interpersonal relationships occur at different scales, with genres being more resistant to change because they are implicated in many relationships.

In this section, I bring these ideas together and explore their implications for education research and practice. In particular, I consider first how the interactions I documented evidence the coevolution of relational and *generic* becoming, and then how this understanding might be applied in classroom contexts in order to foster more Dialogic relationships.

Dialogic Coevolution of Relational and Generic Becoming

Whatever we become in relation to each other is shaped by the “kinds of things” we consider ourselves to be doing together, and these are, in turn, shaped by our interactions over time. In Chapter 5, I make a related argument, suggesting that the way students responded to my efforts to introduce certain concepts/practices with Dialogic potential into our discussions were shaped by their sense of the discussion genre. To further consider the coevolution of relational and *generic* becoming, I return to an interaction I analyzed in Chapter 4—one of my less-than-Dialogic exchanges with Noemi in which she was presented in the group as a shy person. In that analysis, I argued that Noemi’s presence in the group as a shy person emerged dialogically as she was addressed and rendered addressable in certain ways, and I underscored that the ways I addressed her did not always align with the ways she made herself addressable. In terms of the dimensions of Dialogue, I suggested that I was not particularly responsive to Noemi’s emergent presence in the discussion and this constrained the kinds of responses she could give. I also noted that it may be the case that she could have spoken more answerably, and/or that there were things I might have done to capacitate her to do so. I return to this example now in order to illustrate that the (non-)Dialogic qualities of our interaction emerged in response to our sense of the discussion genre. Below, I have provided the transcript, as recorded previously. Recall that this excerpt comes from the transcript of Group 3’s discussion of racism and immigration, after

several students, including Noemi, had indicated that their families had immigrated to the United States. After the other students had told their families' stories, I asked:

Transcript 3		
David	Noemi, do you want to share?	1
Noemi	It's a long story but like, I don't know like the full story because like usually I never like, listen to my, [David : Mm-hmm] my mom say it, [David : Mm-hmm] but like when she tells my other siblings.	2 3 4
David	Do you want to share anything you do know or? You don't have to.	5
Noemi	I, I don't know the full story, so.	6
David	Okay.	7

Responding to me, the other members of the group, and her sense of the discussion genre (which entails the influence of any number of previous interlocutors), Noemi seems to make herself addressable guardedly, appealing to some unwritten rule that stories should only be told if they are known and told in full (see, specifically, lines 2 and 6). We do not know if Noemi believes that partial stories would actually be considered inappropriate in this context, but she seems to assume that such a rule would at least be treated as a legitimate reason for not speaking. If we assume that her responses are to some degree unanswerable, it is worth noting that she implicitly justifies them with regards to the genre. Her sense of the "kind of thing" we were supposed to be doing together, including the rules about what is shareable and/or how she might be excused from sharing, afforded her these responses.

Similarly, my responses to Noemi, with all their unresponsiveness, rely on a sense of genre. Phrasing my comments in terms of what she wants to share and assuring her that she does not have to share anything she does not want to (line 5), I make explicit a norm that is operative in my mind: participation is voluntary. Recognizing the sensitive nature of the topic of immigration, especially in the context of the political polarization during the Trump administration, I did not know if she would feel comfortable sharing her family's story, even if other students had already done so. Not knowing her family's immigration status let alone the

trauma she may have experienced while immigrating or while living in the country as an immigrant family, I wanted to tread carefully.

On one hand, this seems liberating—unlike something like a police interrogation or legal deposition, students are not obliged to respond if they do not want to. On the other hand, this norm implies that there are some things that, for whatever reason, might not be suitable for or safely shared in this context, as part of this genre. In acknowledging students' rights to opt out, we implicitly acknowledge that there are reasons for doing so. This is partly a pragmatic reality—a classroom is not an entirely predictable and sterile system, and not all interlocutors are equally trustworthy or equally prepared to respond appropriately to sensitive sharing—but it is also a function of genre. In other words, it was not simply the prospect of sharing her story with these particular people that led to her silence, but the fact that we were in the process of having a discussion—that this was the “kind of thing” we were doing. Our understanding of the discussion genre predisposed us to consider certain responses to be more or less relevant and requisite. In this case, my sense of the genre inclined me to accept Noemi's bid to be excused rather than responding in some other way (as might have happened in many other settings as part of different genres).

The fact that Noemi and I had several similar interactions over the course of Group 3's meetings (see Chapter 4) is evidence that our relational becoming and *generic* becoming were interrelated. Although these exchanges were not simply the product of our time together—both of us came to the meetings with a sense of the discussion genre—what we ultimately ended up doing together developed one interaction at a time, reinforcing or resisting our preexistent sense of the nature of a discussion, including how we might make a bid to be excused and which bids would be most likely to be considered acceptable in this context.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze precisely how our relational and *generic* becoming coevolved over the course of our time together or to fully characterize the nature of the discussion genres simultaneously at play in our conversations. For my purposes here, I simply intend to clarify how I see these forms of becoming as interrelated.

What I have outlined above is reflected in a variety of ways in the other interactions I documented in the previous chapters. For example, although Brodie manifests it differently than Noemi, he, like her, seems to approach his interlocutors somewhat guardedly. The way he maintains the floor for extended periods of time, introducing multiple ideas in a single turn at talk, and resists making himself directly addressable suggest that, at some level, he views his interlocutors as opponents, competing for both the floor and, perhaps, for intellectual superiority. Similarly, the way I and my student-interlocutors tended to abstract ourselves and narrativized others from the discussion, as discussed in Chapter 4, can be seen as another kind of response to a potentially dangerous interlocutor. This is significant because, as Bakhtin (1986d) notes, speech genres depend largely on “how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees,” emphasizing that “[e]ach speech genre...has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a genre” (p. 95). Looking across the examples I have discussed above, it seems that many of our interactions tacitly assumed that it might be unsafe or inappropriate to openly enter the discussions as ourselves and to respond to each other likewise, with ideas and opinions, yes, but also embodied, storied, and relationally enmeshed persons with a unique voice and perspective. How we viewed each other, how we understood the kind of thing we were doing together, how we addressed each other and rendered ourselves addressable, and, ultimately, who we became were all dialogically interrelated.

While I cannot fully flesh out this vision with regards to the data I have analyzed above, this is the direction they point. Therefore, in what follows, I will assume that the kinds of responses interlocutors give are shaped by their sense of the kind of thing they are engaged in together. Relatedly, I assume that any change in the kind of response an interlocutor gives affects, however slightly, their sense of the genre, just as adjusting their sense of the “kind of thing” they are engaged in changes the kinds of responses they might give. This understanding of the coevolution of relational and *generic* becoming is important because, if we consider moments of classroom discussion to be more than sites of learning—to be sites of more or less ethical encounters between self and Other, and of their dialogic co-authorship of the world—and desire to foster different and more Dialogic responses among classroom interlocutors, it provides us at least two ways into the problem space: 1) considering how, in the course of the discussion, we might respond more Dialogically, and 2) considering the Dialogic affordances of genre. As noted, these two approaches are interrelated, but I think they can be usefully separated for heuristic purposes. While they are interrelated, the first can be viewed as having to do with relational becoming and the second can be seen as having to do with *generic* becoming.

Responding More Dialogically

In considering how, in the course of a discussion, my responses could foster different kinds of relational becoming, I return to several moments of interaction analyzed previously and draw on the dimensions of Dialogue to imagine how I might have responded to my student-interlocutors more answerably, responsively, and capacitatingly. To guide this exploration, I refer to the following synthetic questions that align with the three dimensions of Dialogue:

Table 13: Attuning to Dimensions of Dialogue

Answerability	How do I make myself addressable? To what extent am I speaking as myself, from my own unique perspective, and not merely as the bearer of certain ideas/opinions?
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Responsiveness	How do my interlocutors make themselves (and others) addressable? How might I be moved in response to them?
Capacitation	How can I help my interlocutors speak as themselves, from their unique perspectives, and not merely as the bearers of certain ideas/opinions? How can I help my interlocutors be more responsive to each other?

Example 1

To begin, let us revisit once again the exchange between Noemi and I:

Transcript 3		
David	Noemi, do you want to share?	1
Noemi	It's a long story but like, I don't know like the full story because like usually I never like, listen to my, [David: Mm-hmm] my mom say it, [David: Mm-hmm] but like when she tells my other siblings.	2
		3
		4
David	Do you want to share anything you do know or? You don't have to.	5
Noemi	I, I don't know the full story, so.	6
David	Okay.	7

How might I have responded differently, in ways that might have fostered more Dialogic becoming? One possibility, informed by answerability, is to make myself more explicitly present in how I invite Noemi to share⁹. As it is, my repeated question “do you want to share?” is rather centrifugal in the sense that it places the onus of Dialogic responsibility on her. An alternative and somewhat more centripetal invitation to speak would be something like, “I would like to hear your story too, Noemi.” Phrasing the invitation in this way renders me addressable as someone with an interest in her story, while the original question only renders me addressable abstractly as the one asking the question. The Dialogic potential I see in making myself more explicitly addressable as myself is that it might make it more likely that my student interlocutors would respond to me-myself rather than to me in my role as the teacher/facilitator. While there is no guarantee, it is possible that this shift in my addressability would yield a different address

⁹ This is similar to my comment in Chapter X, in my analysis of Group 1's discussion of abortion.

from Noemi. Of course, there are dangers in this centripetal direction, most notably in asserting the authority of a teacher to compel students to speak, and this should be taken seriously.

However, there are always dangers in both centripetal and centrifugal directions, so the fact that some versions of speaking answerably entail some risk does not necessarily mean that it would be better to avoid that particular risk entirely. As always, what is at stake in this interaction is who we understand ourselves to be and what we understand ourselves to be doing in dialogue with each other. Shifting the ways in which we make ourselves addressable may alter, however slightly, the possibilities of relational/*generic* becoming.

A second possibility, informed by responsiveness (and, relatedly, more centrifugal), is to pay more careful attention to and to be moved by the ways Noemi makes herself addressable. In the transcript, after Noemi sidesteps my initial question, I respond by asking an only slightly adjusted question. Acknowledging that she does not know the full story, I ask, “Do you want to share anything you do know?” Although this question accommodates Noemi’s concern about the partiality of her knowledge, it does not change direction at all but simply reiterates the invitation to share her story. Perhaps by being moved more radically, my response would yield different possibilities of relational becoming. For example, in response to her comment that she does not listen when her mom tells the story to her siblings, I could have said, “So you never listen to your mom tell the story? That’s interesting. Why is that?” This is not to say that Noemi was deliberately offering to speak about her family; as noted, I think her comment is best understood as a bid to be excused. Assuming that to be the case, however, the comment was, crucially, a bid to be excused *from the discussion*—from the genre of activity as she understood it. Allowing myself to be radically moved by how she makes herself addressable is not a way to trick her into

participating in the activity as I understand it; it represents, instead, a willingness to suspend my understanding of the nature of the activity as it unfolds.

The final dimension of Dialogue, capacitation, invites us to consider how we might render our interlocutors capable of different and potentially better responses. Recognizing that the prospect of sharing her family's story on the spot might be daunting to Noemi, I could find ways to facilitate her response. One way to do this would be to ask, "Noemi, is your family's story similar to the ones the other students shared?" A question like this might provide a kind of steppingstone to help Noemi begin telling her story. There are, of course, other, more extensive ways to do something similar. I could, for example, respond by saying, "Would you like to take some time to talk to your mom and prepare to share your story in our next meeting?" A response like this would alter the temporal/spatial (in Bakhtin's terms, "chronotopic") scale of the activity from one typical of discussions (i.e., taking place in a single sitting over tens of minutes) to one that spans home and school and stretches across multiple days, perhaps providing Noemi alternative ways to respond and be presenced in the group.

Example 2

Let us now consider a very different moment from our discussions. This excerpt, analyzed previously in Chapter 4, comes from Group 1's discussion of abortion. Although Brodie's manner of participating in our discussions seems very different from Noemi's, both have similar issues in that they are rendered addressable in such a way that their unique perspective is obscured or withheld from the group. In addition, it seems that Brodie sometimes lacks a certain responsiveness to his interlocutors, which may or may not be the case with Noemi. (Because she abstained from participating verbally in so much of our discussions, there is no empirical evidence regarding the extent to which she attended to and was moved by the

other members of the group.) Another obvious difference between this interaction and the previous one is that there is only one speaker. However, I still consider this to be an “interaction” both because not speaking is a form of response and because there was much happening at a non-verbal level, as I briefly explain in what follows. I will not attempt a full-fledged interaction analysis, but I want to highlight some of the nonverbal behavior that took place during Brodie’s comment in order to demonstrate that, in a classroom discussion, we are always responding not only to the current speaker, but to the other participants as well. This complicates the question of what constitutes an ethical response because we may find ourselves pulled in different directions by various interlocutors. It is not always obvious which of the dimension(s) of Dialogue we should prioritize in relation to a single interlocutor, let alone when we are responding to multiple interlocutors in different modalities simultaneously. Here is Brodie’s comment:

Transcript 4 (excerpt)		
Brodie	I do kind of- I'm interested by this notion that the humanistic quality of life, like often people disassociate humans as like a species, or like an animalistic species, but like the humanistic quality of life, I don't- I would agree. I don't think it's found as a fetus. I think there is something about a shared human experience that gives you a sense of humanistic life, and I- I don't know if I would've went so far to like name examples, but I agree with the theory, I guess. I guess, um something else that I've heard raised a lot recently, people often when they talk about abortions will say that they're worried the baby or fetus will suffer. A baby will suffer if born. Something else that I've heard raised recently is people having a very philosophical and ethical debate is, what world am I bringing a child into? Not that the child might necessarily suffer when it gets here from like anything physical or biologically wrong with it, but um, this id- this notion that maybe you're bringing into a child, a child into a world that is not fit for it to be prosperous or live a healthy, good life, whatever standards you want to set to it. This notion that just because a child is born, does not, or a baby is born, it is not instantaneously guaranteed the same equal human experience that every other baby is. So maybe there has to be this ethical question of what life am I bringing a person into? And I think that's just something that, it's been very recently talked about. But I don't think that most people are acknowledging like there are different qualities of life that may impact this decision.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

With the group seated around a squarish arrangement of tables, Brodie sat opposite me (see Figure 6). He begins by responding to a brief discussion among other students about the

comparability of a human fetus to a non-human animal and then, holding the floor, transitions to “something else” (line 6) he has heard recently.

Figure 6: Group Seating Arrangement



Throughout his comment, my gaze was directed intently at Brodie (see Figures 6, 7, and 8) as I tried to understand what he was saying and considered how, if at all, I should intervene. In fact, it wasn't until I reviewed the video recording that I became consciously aware of what other students were doing, and I was surprised to see that as early as line 5, Ted and Makenzie raised their hands (see Figure 7), and kept them raised throughout Brodie's comment, though with some discretion. Makenzie rests her elbow on the table, and Ted lets his forearm fall behind his head as if scratching his back. At line 16 seeming to sense (accurately) that a conclusion is drawing near, Ted brings his arm out and seems to make eye contact with Makenzie, but lowers it to his forehead as Brodie continues. As he lowers it, Anand's hand shoots up, and there are three hands raised as Brodie concludes (see Figure 8).



Figure 7: Hands Raised 1

Figure 8: Hands Raised 2

What is especially complicated about moments like this is that the teacher/facilitator has multiple and sometimes contradictory obligations to different students. In this case, for instance, by allowing Brodie to hold the floor for extended periods of time both by not interrupting and by way of follow-up questions as the discussion continued, I excluded others from speaking. While there is something potentially Dialogic in that kind of responsiveness to a single student-interlocutor, it is also myopic because it simultaneously ignores and excludes others in the group. While Brodie spoke and answered our questions, others were pushed to the side. Recognizing that my obligations to different student-interlocutors pulled me in different directions, what might I have done differently to foster Dialogic relations not simply between me and Brodie, but as widely as possible among the group?

Inspired by answerability and noticing the way Brodie obscured his addressability, I could have invited him to make himself addressable more directly, perhaps saying something like, “So these are ideas you’ve heard. Can you help us understand where you stand in relation to them?” A question like this may have encouraged Brodie to enter the conversation more clearly as himself and shifted, however slightly, his understanding of the nature of our discussions by fostering an environment in which interlocutors are encouraged to “sign their names.” Understanding that, in our discussions, we were expected to speak from our unique perspective as ourselves may have shifted the way Brodie tended to participate, perhaps for the better.

Another answerability-inspired response would be not simply to invite Brodie to sign his name, but to encourage him to make himself addressable as something more than the bearer of certain ideas and opinions. One way to do this would be to invite storytelling of some kind, perhaps with a question such as, “Can you tell us how you arrived at these ideas?” or “What experiences in your life inform your opinion about this?”

Another approach would be to encourage the group members to be more responsive to each other, including both Brodie and his listeners, some of whom were beginning to vie for the floor, perhaps suggesting that they were not attending very carefully to Brodie’s comment. Recognizing that we might be unresponsive both while speaking and listening, I could have encouraged group members to pay careful attention to each other rather than focusing on what they personally hoped to say with a comment such as, “I’m noticing that several people seem to have something to say. As both listeners and speakers, let’s try to be mindful of other members of the group and willing to yield to them.” Of course, there are ways to be more assertive in this regard. For example, I could have interrupted Brodie around line 6, before he transitioned to a new idea, and suggested that we continue to engage with the ideas he was responding to. To do that, I could have said, “Before we transition, let’s stick with this idea a bit more. It feels to me that the question of what makes us human is central to this whole discussion, and, if I’ve understood, you’re suggesting that our humanity isn’t inherent, but acquired as we participate in a shared world. I’m curious what everyone thinks about that.” A move like this might have fostered more responsive relations among the group.

Example 3

The next example comes from the same conversation, shortly after Brodie’s comment discussed above. Again, I will focus my considerations on how I might have responded differently in this situation. The exchange begins with Anand’s follow-up question:

Transcript 4 (excerpt)		
Anand	So, what you were saying- So, um, so like how would you view it if, let's say, someone who's born in a rich family and had a teen pregnancy and they were at high school, or whatever, and they decided to get an abortion. Compared to someone who was like, in a actually a very difficult situation, where they could not raise the baby in a healthy environment. Would you see- would it- would one be more okay than the other?	34 35 36 37 38
Brodie	I'm very pro choice, I think either's fine.	39
Anand	So okay, so-	40
Brodie	but I, but I think that is something that a lot of, um, a lot of people and, very, including myself, there's a actually a film that raises this notion to me, it was called, it was called A Private Life. It's about a couple that's trying to have a baby and they have to do it, not like naturally, I do not, it's like a sperm don-, they get a sperm donor. But um, while she's like filling out the papers, she goes to this kind of like a meta-level philosophical like struggle with like, What am I doing to this child? Like they're coming into a world that is not in a good place right now. And then she goes off on this <u>tangent</u> about all the issues in the world that she's bringing a child into. And until I saw that, I was like, wow, I never thought of it like that. I always thought of it much like you all are thinking, or most people think about it as like, Am I bringing a child into a place where they are going to suffer physically or for whatever biological reason, where it's like, at some point there's like a moral question of like suffering too.	41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52
David	So when you talk about the world, you're not talking about the- like the family's socioeconomic status.	53 54

Attuned to my answerability in this moment, I notice, once again, that my response to Brodie only renders me addressable in the abstract. Articulated in the second person, only Brodie is explicitly present and addressable in my words. While I invite Brodie to speak, I do not reveal anything about where I stand or why I am asking. This is potentially problematic because it complicates Brodie’s response and, at least in the context of this discussion, seems to encourage him to respond somewhat guardedly. What might have happened if I had said something like, “It sounds to me like you’re saying that the world is so bad that it might be morally wrong to bring

children into it. I don't think I agree with that, but I want to make sure I understand what you're saying before I respond"? In this imagined response, I paraphrase what I take to be Brodie's point and state that I disagree with what I understand him to be saying, clarifying where I stand on the issue. While the substance of my original and imagined responses are similar, in this latter formulation, the discussion is situated in the space between interlocutors, both of whom are explicitly present in the discourse. Might a response like this yield a different response from Brodie? To be clear, I do not think that simply using "I-statements" necessarily makes a response more Dialogic, but I think the tendency to speak as ourselves and address our interlocutors in their particularity—to see the discussion as taking place between two or more people and not simply on the plane of ideas—is conducive to Dialogic relations.

As I consider how I might have been more responsive to Brodie, it is worth noting how he makes himself addressable. In these turns at talk, it seems to me that he makes himself addressable as "very pro-choice" (line 39), as someone who has seen and was affected by the film *Private Life*, and as someone who used to think about abortion in a different way than he does now. In the flow of the discussion, however, I was disposed only to address him as the bearer of certain ideas that I wanted to clarify. What if I had said, "I would like to hear a little more about how the movie changed your perspective. How did you think about this before watching the movie and what changed?" This kind of question is oriented not simply to understanding Brodie's ideas, but understanding him as the one who holds those ideas.

Another way that the dimensions of Dialogue attune me to this passage is with regards to a narrativized Other—the protagonist of the film—who might be rendered more capable of addressing the group. In this case, unlike in the instances of storytelling discussed previously, the narrativized Other is fictional, but this does not mean that we could not have entered into

Dialogue with her to some degree. Recognizing both that she represented a unique voice and perspective, and that Brodie was responding to her—that he existed in response to her just as he was drawn out in response to others—rather than simply addressing Brodie as if he were a self-contained and distinct individual whose ideas I wanted to clarify, I might have attempted to render the film’s protagonist capable of addressing us. In order to capacitate her of having a voice in our conversation, I could have said, “I’m interested to hear what she says. Why don’t we pull up the clip and hear the tangent ourselves?” Again, there is no telling if responding in this way would have proven any more Dialogic, but a willingness to see our interlocutors in their responsivity—as being in dialogue with those who are physically present and others—may change the way we address them, perhaps for the better.

Example 4

The final example I will consider is the following exchange between Patience and me which took place during one of Group 3’s discussions about toxic masculinity (see Chapter 4). Here, Patience’s comment follows several other students who had been talking about how men and women are treated differently:

Transcript 7		
Patience	Yeah. My mom used to, well she still do make the boys, him [Brandin] and my brother cut the grass. [David: Mm-hmm.] And I used to like, go out there and wanna help and stuff and she used to be like, nah, nah. And I'm just like, why can't I help like [David: Mm] just 'cause I'm a girl, don't mean nothing. I'm a girl and I do a lot of stuff. [David: Mm-hmm] Like I'm a girl and I lift a lot of stuff and it just kinda irritating sometimes 'cause it's like, you don't see the value in what girls have. You just see that [David: Right] men are supposed to be like [David: Hm.] more like aggressive or stronger, when that's not the case. [David: Yeah] I mean this is not a bad thing but like, I wish they would, they would see that in women too.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
David	Yeah. Yeah so what I hear you saying this, like, I said, you know, it could be a good thing to say men are brave and strong or whatever, but you bring up that, the danger in that is, if by saying that, you imply that women are not that,	11 12 13

	right? Like if men are brave and strong, what does that mean about women? And one thing that people could say is like, that means women are not so much those things. Right?	14 15 16
Patience	Mm-hmm (affirmative).	17
David	Yeah. So, I've, I think that's a, good point.	18

In my response to Patience, I make myself addressable as having said that it could be good to associate certain characteristics with men, and as considering her response (or at least my ventriloquation of her) which problematizes that idea to be valid. Once again, I am discursively presented as merely the bearer of certain ideas and opinions. If I were to try to speak more explicitly as an embodied, storied, and relationally enmeshed person, I might explain something of where my idea comes from and why it is meaningful to me personally. I might, for example, explain that I discipline my son when he is physically aggressive toward my daughter more than I discipline her when she is physically aggressive toward him partly because he is male and will, in all likelihood, end up physically bigger and stronger than her and other women in his life. I want to make sure that from a young age he understands that it is inappropriate for boys to hit girls. This parenting approach is based on the understanding that boys and girls are different and that those differences may justify different treatment in certain situations. By making myself addressable as a person for whom these ideas are meaningful in my relationality, I would enter the discourse more clearly as myself and not merely as the bearer of certain opinions and ideas. This imagined response, I realize, would also follow suit with most of Patience's own turn at talk, rather than shifting the discussion away from storytelling and back toward abstractions, which is what I did in the original exchange.

As always, my response to Patience stems from how I attend to her and, specifically, how I recognize the ways in which she is rendered addressable. Although in the moment, I attended

mostly to the conceptual substance of her comment, in retrospect, I realize that her comment renders her addressable in several other ways: as someone who is frustrated by her mother's gendered division of labor, as a capable and physically strong girl, and as someone who wishes that "they" would see traditionally masculine qualities in women too. Responding to these other kinds of addressability, instead of reverting immediately to abstractions, I might have said, "You seem especially irritated with the idea some people have that boys are stronger than girls. I'd be interested to hear more about that." Or perhaps, noting that she seems drawn to address her mother, and sensing that this may be particularly significant for Patience, I could have responded by saying, "You said, sort of speaking to your mom, 'You don't see the value in what girls have.' Can you say more about that and about what your mom might be missing?" In both of these cases, my imagined responses would address Patience on dimensions other than the abstract point I understood her to be making, and this may have engendered different and more Dialogic relations among the group.

Recognizing that Patience had rendered her mother addressable, I could also have tried to capacitate this narrativized Other of fuller presence and voice in the discussion. For example, I could have invited Patience to sympathize with and ventriloquate her mother by asking, "Why do you think your mom has the boys cut the grass and stuff like that? What would she say if she were here?" In this way, perhaps, we would not only encounter Patience's mother more fully, but we would relate to Patience more fully in her relationality.

Commentary

To be clear, I am not saying that the students are to blame for whatever non-Dialogic dynamics were present in our discussions; each of these turns at talk were responses to me and the other members of the group and to our various senses of the genre of the activity we were

engaged in together, so we were all implicated in the quality of our discussion. I do not know what would have resulted, in each instance, from a response like the ones I have imagined above, let alone the extent to which they would have fostered Dialogic relations. What I am exploring here is simply how the dimensions of Dialogue might attune us to possible responses with Dialogic potential—sensitizing us to how our responses, spoken and unspoken, afford certain responses from our student-interlocutors in ways that affect the whole group.

The possibilities I have explored above do not exhaust the various ways we might, informed by the dimensions of Dialogue, reimagine the interaction, but I hope they show how teachers/facilitators could adjust their responses to students along the lines of answerability, responsiveness, and capacitation. Considering how they and student interlocutors are rendered addressable, are addressed, and are made capable of responding—and how they might do so differently—educators could adjust how they participate in and facilitate classroom discussions. Much of this could happen within the paradigm of conventional discussions though, as noted, changing how interlocutors respond to each other necessarily changes the genre, at least inasmuch as it relates to what that particular group of people are doing together.

Shifting the Discussion Genre

The second approach to fostering Dialogue is to explicitly consider how the discussion genre might be shifted in order to afford different kinds of responses. It seems to me that this can occur either by following one of the dimensions of Dialogue until you arrive at a practice of another genre, or starting with another genre with Dialogic potential and asking what it would be like if a discussion become more like that “kind of thing.” For example, I sense resonance between some of the responses I imagined above and practices of ensemble improvisation and group therapy. There are surely other genres that could be drawn upon, but for the purposes of

this exploration, I will consider these two, which strike me as useful foils to typical classroom practice. What might we learn from these genres?

What If Classroom Discussions Were More Like Improv?

Ensemble improvisation is a form of collective, spontaneous authorship. Because an improv performance is unscripted, the players must pay careful attention to each other's contributions so that, in responding, the scene maintains some coherence; and because these contributions are unpredictable, players must be willing to abandon their own emerging sense about where the scene is going in favor of another's. As Rossing & Hoffmann-Longtin (2016) note:

To think like an improviser is to...become open to allowing the action to develop by accepting the ideas of the ensemble...[A] player is alert and listening to all the offers a scene partner presents...[I]mprovisers must recognize everything that their ensemble says and does as a "gift" or "offer" that they might use to advance the scene...Good improvisers do not steal the spotlight and outshine one another. They collaboratively co-construct a compelling story. (n.p.)

This ethos, often summarized with the words "Yes, and" (a phrase that gestures toward the way players must receive each other's contributions and build on them), strikes me as being resonant with responsiveness. Indeed, it seems perfectly fitting to describe improv artists with the words I have used to characterize responsiveness: as responding to each other with careful attention and dynamic openness—and careful not simply in the sense that they must pay close attention, but in the sense that they respond with some benevolence. As Johnstone (1980) explains, good improvisers focus less on making their own contributions interesting and more on making the contributions of other players interesting (p. 100). This is not to say that ensemble improv is an

entirely Dialogic field; especially in terms of answerability, it seems to be lacking because, in general, improv artists are playing a role and not responding as themselves. However, given the resonances between improv practices and at least one dimension of Dialogue, it seems a fertile field for learning how to be more responsive to our interlocutors. Perhaps by exploring how they might engage in and facilitate classroom discussions more improvisatorially, teacher/facilitators would find ways to better foster Dialogue. Note that the purpose of this exploration is not simply to consider how improv practices might benefit the discussion (taking the discussion genre for granted), but to consider what a discussion might become in response to more improvisatory practices and who the interlocutors might become together by participating such a genre.

One approach to this pedagogical exploration would be to use reminder cards, like those I made for Group 3, to invite students to try responding to each other with an ethos of “yes, and”—receiving their interlocutors’ offerings and contributing to them, even when that means leaving behind, at least for the moment, their own ideas. Because so much of improv is based on imagined scenarios and role-playing while, in Dialogue, interlocutors speak as themselves as much as possible, I do not think “yes, and” practices can simply be applied to a classroom discussion, but I have tried to capture what seems fundamental to the ethos in Figure 9—and to do so in a way that did not seem like it was encouraging students to simply agree with each other and then add something else (something they did quite often). To avoid that misunderstanding, I have labeled the practice I might invite students to experiment with “Go Along With It.”

Figure 9: Possible Reminder Card

Go Along With It

Instead of trying to figure out what you're going to say next, pay really close attention to what other people say and then go along with it. To do this, you have to be willing to let go of what you want to talk about and build on what others want to talk about.

Examples

- I think there's something really interesting in what NAME said...
- Let's explore that idea...

In the exchange between Rosa and Amala (discussed in Chapter 4), for example, what might have happened if Amala, glancing at a reminder card like this one, had responded to Rosa by taking up something she raises in her implicit storytelling rather than returning to something Sandy said and adding a new idea? I have tried to imagine how that interaction might have played out differently below:

Original Interaction (Transcript 5)		
Rosa	I feel like for me like, I don't need my father for be happy. I can be happy with my mom, [throws hands up] only me and her. [throws hands up] Like that's...	3 4
Amala	[Raises hand] [David: nod] So, adding on to what she [pointing to Sandy] said about how she [the female narrator] made women seem weak, she like used stereotypes of women and men. Like, men should be strong, like this type of thing and then, women need a strong man, but she should've like made them both seem equal. 'Cause she... yeah.	5 6 7 8
Imagined Alternative Interaction		
Rosa	I feel like for me like, I don't need my father for be happy. I can be happy with my mom, [throws hands up] only me and her. [throws hands up] Like that's...	3 4
Amala	I think I could be happy with my mom too if, God forbid, something happened to my dad. We're both strong, so it's not like we need him to take care of us. I love my dad, but I mean he doesn't even know how to cook, so.	5 6 7
Rosa	Me too! He don't cook ever.	8

Obviously, we do not know what Amala might have said if she had tried to be more responsive to Rosa, nor do we have any idea how Rosa might have responded, but it seems likely that such a response would open up possibilities for presencing Rosa differently in the group by addressing her and allowing her to become addressable in new ways. Whereas, as it actually played out, Rosa's implicit storytelling is functionally ignored, in the imagined alternative, she has another turn at talk and, through Amala's resonant storytelling, becomes associated with

strong and capable women. Who knows who she might have become in the group with more interactions along these lines? It is worth noting that Rosa is not the only potential beneficiary of Amala's responsiveness. Responding to Rosa's implicit storytelling, Amala shares a simple hypothetical story (what would happen without her dad) and a self-story (her dad does not know how to cook), rendering herself addressable in more personal ways and not simply as the bearer of certain ideas and opinions.

I am not the first to sense the potential of improvisation with regards to both ethics and pedagogy (see, for example, Philip, 2019; Sawyer, 2004; Tanner, Leander, & Carter-Stone, 2020). However, unlike much of this emerging literature, I situate improv practices in relation to Dialogue, which I find to be a more robust ideal both ethically and pedagogically than improvisation per se. In this light, it is important to remember that responsiveness is only one of the dimensions of Dialogue and, thus, while it may be beneficial to cultivate more improvisatory responsiveness, such a focus could also backfire if it is not tempered with a complementary focus on answerability and capacitation. To that end, I now turn a different genre that may help us imagine other ways of being together: group therapy.

What If Classroom Discussions Were More Like Group Therapy?

Group therapy is based on the assumption that fostering healthy relationships within a group will ultimately benefit the individuals involved, even in relationships with people not in the group. The literature on group therapy posits a variety of mechanisms by which this occurs, often referred to as "therapeutic factors." In his seminal work on the topic, Yalom (1995) suggests that the individuals participating together in group therapy under the direction of a therapist or two form a kind of analog to the family, allowing each other to better understand, explore, practice, and be coached in healthy relationships. Thus, although therapists are

interested in helping their clients develop healthy relationships outside the group, they believe that one of the best ways to provide this help is to foster healthy relationships within the group.

With this goal, the way therapists respond to their clients and allot time in a session of group therapy can be very different from how teachers tend to facilitate classroom discussions. One difference is that therapists are likely to devote significantly more time to metacommunication. This is because, unlike most classroom discussions, the process of communication, broadly conceived, is the subject matter, not simply a means to a separate end. With this telos, therapists are counseled to discuss with the group, for example, the factors that may affect the extent to which clients feel comfortable opening up and disclosing personal information. Believing that self-disclosure is important for many reasons¹⁰, therapists seek to foster an environment in which proper forms of sharing emotions and personal information are encouraged, and they seek to explicitly address obstacles that impede their clients from doing so. For instance, in their handbook of group therapy, Chen & Rybak (2018) suggest that, upon sensing some resistance to self-disclosure, a therapist might say something like, “I wonder whether we could spend some time exploring *what you are worried about* when you think of *bringing something up?*” (n.p.). In a similar vein, Yalom (1995) recounts an episode in which a group member seemed to participate in the sessions without revealing anything significant about himself. Responding to this tendency to remain in “comfortable, safe territory,” he asked: “Joe, if you were to think about revealing yourself on a ten-point scale, with ‘one’ representing cocktail-party stuff and ‘ten’ representing the most you could ever imagine revealing about yourself to another person, how would you rank what you did in the

¹⁰ The literature acknowledges that there are also maladaptive forms of self-disclosure.

group over the last ten minutes?” He thought about it for a moment and said he guessed he would give himself ‘three’ or ‘four.’ I asked, “Joe, what would happen if you were to move it up a rung or two?” (p. 360)

What might happen if, in the course of classroom discussions, teachers and students engaged in this kind of metacommunication? I can imagine, for instance, responding to Noemi’s repeated bids to be excused from the conversation by inviting her and the rest of the group to consider what may be preventing them from revealing aspects of themselves to the group, as imagined below:

Original Interaction (Transcript 3)		
David	Noemi, do you want to share?	1
Noemi	It’s a long story but like, I don’t know like the full story because like usually I never like, listen to my, [David: Mm-hmm] my mom say it, [David: Mm-hmm] but like when she tells my other siblings.	2 3 4
David	Do you want to share anything you do know or? You don’t have to.	5
Noemi	I, I don’t know the full story, so.	6
David	Okay.	7
Imagined Alternative Interaction		
David	Noemi, do you want to share?	1
Noemi	It’s a long story but like, I don’t know like the full story because like usually I never like, listen to my, [David: Mm-hmm] my mom say it, [David: Mm-hmm] but like when she tells my other siblings.	2 3 4
David	You seem a little hesitant to share this story. Why do you think that is?	5
Noemi	I, I don’t know the full story, so.	6
David	To me, that sounds like an excuse. Now nobody is going to make you share, but we want everyone to feel safe sharing, and I hope you will eventually choose to share. What could we do to make this a safer space for people to tell their stories in this group? For those of you who feel comfortable sharing, what helped you get to that point?	7 8 9 10 11
Patience	Personally, I just had to realize that, even if what I said was dumb, nobody was going to make fun of me.	12 13

Just as I am not an improv artist, I am not a trained therapist, so these imagined scenarios should be taken with a grain of salt. However, inspired by what I have learned about group therapy, I am intrigued by the potential of this kind of response. By explicitly attending to the

group's communicative processes and encouraging potentially beneficial "moves" like self-disclosure, a teacher/facilitator can help the group move beyond default assumptions and conventions about how a discussion works and engage with each other more authentically, more fully as themselves. In this case, by naming Noemi's bid to be excused as a way to avoid self-disclosure and explicitly considering what we could do as a group to cultivate an environment in which people would not feel the need to avoid self-disclosure, perhaps we could begin the process of becoming a group in which Noemi would speak more openly. In the moment, I simply felt like Noemi was shy and did not feel comfortable sharing her family's story, and I felt some commitment not to compel students to speak, so I yielded to the unwritten rules Noemi implicitly invokes in her bid to be excused rather than considering what we might do to make such a bid unnecessary. To be clear, I do not believe that a single moment of metacommunication would suddenly make Noemi feel comfortable participating in the group, but if moments like this were common throughout our time together, I think her patterns of participation—and those of other students—may have changed.

Moving Forward

Ensemble improv and group therapy are only two of any number of possible genres that might inform the way we respond to our student-interlocutors in the context of classroom "discussions." I use scare quotes because I want to remember that, like everything else, the nature of a discussion is not settled and finalized. To assume otherwise is to place limits of the kinds of relational becoming that are likely to emerge within the context of a discussion. If the cases I have documented are similar to the discussions that take place in other classrooms—and I suspect they are—maintaining the prevailing definition of the genre will only perpetuate the guarded and abstracted communication that produces the kinds of relational becoming typical

classroom discussions and of schooling more generally, with its legion of well-documented problems.

If we are to enter more fully into Dialogic relations with our student-interlocutors and better cultivate Dialogue among them, we must be willing to reimagine what might happen in a discussion. To be clear, I am not suggesting that classroom discussions should simply become like ensemble improv and/or group therapy, but I am calling for educators to experiment with some of the practices of these genres and to consider other ways in which they might respond to students and help them respond to each other more answerably, responsively, and capacitatingly—to explore the kinds of relational becoming that such practices afford. Each interaction that pushes the envelope with regards to the discussion genre influences, however slightly, how students will understand what it means to participate in a discussion, at least as it relates to that particular class. And, little by little, different kinds of interactions will yield different kinds of relational and *generic* becoming.

As I have tried to understand and respond to Bakhtin’s vision of Dialogue, I have come to appreciate more fully the fact that we exist and live “in response”—to our interlocutors past and present and to our various senses of the “kind(s) of thing” we are doing together. This includes not simply the ideational material of these interactions, but all their embodied, relational, and storied baggage. We are inextricably entangled in these relationships, always already responding to something or someone beyond ourselves. To take this seriously requires us to rethink assumptions prevalent in schooling, including the mind/body dualism that allows us to respond to each other in a discussion as if what ultimately matters is that which can be abstracted from our stories, experiences, and relationships.

Furthermore, if we assume from the start that our student-interlocutors exist “in response,” we must acknowledge that we are implicated in their relational becoming and have an ethical obligation to respond to them answerably, responsively, and capacitatingly. I do not pretend that doing so is simple; I do not even know if it is possible. It is challenging enough in a one-on-one interaction to discern which dimension of Dialogue should be prioritized and how it should be manifest in a given moment. Multiply that complexity by the number of students in a classroom and we arrive at an impossibly complex situation in which there are sometimes contradictory obligations and any number of possible responses that could be beneficial but might be harmful to certain students and/or to the group as a whole. There are no clear answers and no guarantees, and yet we must respond with the knowledge that each response is an act of co-authoring the world and our places in it, with implications for who students will understand themselves to be and who they will become relative to us, the disciplines we represent, their classmates, and their future.

At some level, educators know this, but it is easy to shrug off the full weight of that burden and to seek an alibi in the systems and genres of schooling. When our job is simply to teach the content of a given course and not to cultivate Dialogic relations, there is less ambiguity, so it is easier to understand what we ought to do and to what extent we have been successful. But the presence or lack of ambiguity is not a sufficient reason to (not) do something. Although I do not know if or how teachers can respond to all their students Dialogically, I have begun to sense the dimensions along which I can strive. And perhaps, over time, I will become more attuned to the relational becoming of the classroom community and more discerning about the kinds of responses I might make in a given moment.

What is perfectly clear to me is that I exist in relation to the Other and the way I respond has, above all, an ethical quality. When I face a classroom of students, I am facing a group of persons toward whom I am ethically obligated. As a teacher, I have pedagogical obligations as well, but I must not forget that, before they are students, they are unique individuals who are themselves living “in response” to me and to others. There may not be clear answers about how best to respond in a given moment, but I am beginning to understand some of the questions I should be asking: How do I make myself addressable? To what extent am I speaking as myself, from my own unique perspective, and not merely as bearer of certain ideas/opinions? How do my interlocutors make themselves (and others) addressable? How might I be moved in response to them? How can I help my interlocutors speak as themselves, from their unique perspectives, and not merely as bearers of certain ideas/opinions? How can I help my interlocutors be more responsive to each other?

Coda: Ethics and Equity

As I conclude this writing, the Trump administration is in the final weeks of its term, and the Biden administration is preparing to transition to the White House. Levels of polarization seem to have continued unabated, often fueled by issues related to race and racism. Indeed, a group of Republican senators recently announced that it would oppose the results of the Electoral College, sparking an outcry that they were seeking to disenfranchise people of color. Increasingly, classroom discussions about contemporary and controversial issues will need to explicitly grapple with race. Although I have not foregrounded these issues in my dissertation, I believe that what I have articulated here is relevant and potentially helpful for the field’s efforts to understand and promote equitable, culturally sustaining, humanizing, and anti-racist pedagogies (though that help may sometimes take the form of constructive criticism).

Although I appreciate much of the work stemming from these various frameworks, I am often concerned by approaches that implicitly or explicitly preestablish desired outcomes rather than focusing on relational processes. The danger of this approach is that you will end up pursuing—or even achieving—some form of equity that may be unethical. I think, for example, of the viral image that distinguishes between equality and equity by showing two approaches to helping a group of children watch a baseball game over a fence. In the first version which depicts equality, they are each given a box of the same size to stand on; unfortunately, one box is not enough for some of the children to see over the fence. In the second version which depicts equity, they are each given the number of boxes they need to see over the fence. The image is useful heuristically, but I am struck by its assumption that all of the children want to watch the baseball game in the first place. My point here is simply that it may be possible to realize “equity” non-Dialogically, imposing some predetermined outcome, metric, or understanding on a world that defies predetermination and on people that are unpredictable and noncoincident. Like everything else, the nature of both equity and the people for whom it is sought are not given, but dialogically authored. Thus, rather than starting with some predetermined end in mind—even an end as virtuous as equity—I have followed Bakhtin in valorizing the open-ended processes of Dialogue, recognizing that my understanding of other people and the world is partial, perspectival, and potentially oppressive. In pursuing equity, at least as it relates to interpersonal relationships (the scale with which I have concerned myself), we must seek to do so as Dialogically as possible, addressing our interlocutors answerably, responsively, and capacitatingly, and being willing to revise what equity might mean in relation to these particular interlocutors and how it ought to be pursued.

It may be that issues of race, given the historical trauma inflicted on people of color in the United States, especially Black Americans, are fundamentally different than other issues and therefore deserve special consideration. However, it is also true that race, like everything else in the logosphere, is rendered meaningful in response to extant genres (broadly conceived) and personal experiences over time and, thus, may be analogous in some ways to what I have discussed in this dissertation. If this is the case, it could be useful to consider questions of race relations in terms of relational becoming. Assuming some analogy between the entrenched and problematic pedagogical relationships of school and the entrenched and problematic relationships between racial groups—and particularly the various manifestations of White supremacy—we can identify two broad ways to begin shifting the possibilities of racial relational becoming: 1) considering how we can respond to the racial Other more answerably, responsively, and capacitatingly, and 2) considering how we might revise the genres that shape (and are shaped by) our interactions.

Although I think these heuristics might be applied in any number of ways (e.g., one way to lower police violence against Black Americans is to find ways to shift the genre of policing), I will limit my remarks to how they might inform of the work of classroom teachers. One rather obvious takeaway is simply that it would be beneficial for teachers to reflect on how they embody the dimensions of Dialogue in their pedagogical relationships. For White teachers especially, it seems likely that what will be called for in relation to their students of color is more responsiveness and capacitation: How carefully do they attend to these students? What aspects of their students of color do they focus on? How do these students render themselves addressable, and how do teachers address them, and how might they do so differently?

Teachers could also deliberately seek to foster more Dialogic relations among their students. Recognizing that, at any given moment, students will have a variety of understandings of the nature of the activity they are engaged in, this will likely require some amount of metacommunication and coaching, perhaps along the lines of what I have considered above. Recognizing, also, that students are not simply responding to the people with whom they are physically present, teachers can seek to facilitate some kind of Dialogue with narrativized Others, ventriloquating them or otherwise inviting students to hear and respond to the persons with whom they and their peers are relationally enmeshed. By cultivating a classroom environment in which students encounter and respond to each other as multifaceted, embodied, relational beings, they may be less likely to address each other in reductive, stereotyped ways.

Lastly, as teachers are willing to question and revise the genres that shape the school day, they will open up possibilities of relational becoming between them and their students, and among the students. I have discussed above how the genre of classroom discussions might evolve, and something similar could be imagined in relation to any number of pedagogical genres—participating in a lecture, taking a test, transitioning between classes, etc. None of these genres is entirely settled, and shifting them may be conducive to more Dialogic relationships. A willingness to view the school day critically and consider how aspects of school might be done differently (in general or by different students) may lead to more humane conditions for marginalized students.

I offer these brief reflections in the hope that they will provide a bridge between the ethics-oriented work I have done and the equity work many others are doing. I know I have much to learn from them. And I know that, at both micro and macro scales, Americans have much to learn about how to better relate to the racial Other. I hope that something of what I have

articulated here will prove to be useful in cultivating Dialogic relations across racial lines and helping us become something new together.

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Appendix A: Course Syllabus

Talking Across Differences in an Age of Polarization: A Group Examination of Dialogue and Social Media Communication

Course Description:

In this course, we will explore issues related to communicating across political differences. Drawing on a variety of ethical frameworks, empirical research, and anecdotal/artistic representations, we will consider why political dialogue can be so challenging and how it might be made more productive. Students will be asked to synthesize this material in order to articulate their own working theory about the principles that should guide their efforts to communicate across political differences. Along with this theoretical work, students will observe and engage in a number of actual conversations on- and offline which they will be asked to reflect on and evaluate in light of their emerging theories (which can—and should—evolve in response to these practical experiences).

Course Meetings:

Jan. 08 4:00-4:50 p.m.*
Jan. 15, 4:00-6:00 p.m.
Jan. 22, 4:00-6:00 p.m.
Jan. 29, 4:00-6:00 p.m.
Feb. 05, 4:00-6:00 p.m.
Feb. 12, 4:00-6:00 p.m.
Feb. 19, 4:00-6:00 p.m.
Feb. 26, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

*Note that the first session meets for 50 minutes, while the remaining sessions are two hours long.

Course Goals:

The core questions we will grapple with throughout the semester are:

- What makes communicating across political differences challenging?
- What can be done to make communicating across political differences more productive?
- What is the ultimate goal of communicating across political differences?

Across the semester, we will reflect on these questions in general *and as they relate to students' own experiences and goals*. By the end of the course, students will be able to answer these questions and articulate *their own personal philosophy* about communicating across political differences. In the process, they will also hone their ability to more effectively communicate with people who think differently than they do about political issues.

Evaluation:

Students' grades will be based on their thoughtful and engaged participation in the course activities. This includes the weekly reflections on readings, other assignments, and in-class discussions. Information/exemplars will be provided for each assignment. Because of the abbreviated nature of this course, we ask that students attend every session. Also, as this is a course about dialogue, we expect students to participate regularly during in-class discussions. If they are unable to attend any session or consistently do not participate during class, they will lose participation points.

Final grades will be determined based on the following distribution:

Reflection Assignments: 20% (approximately 5 pts each week)*
Other Assignments: 10% (approximately 5 pts each)
Participation in class: 30% (approximately 4 pts each session)
Final Paper: 40%

*Note: Reflection assignments are due by Monday at 11:59 PM (the day before class)

Honor Code and Academic Honesty:

The Honor Code governs all work in this course and presumes that all work submitted is the product of the student submitting it. Uncertainty about the application of the Honor Code does not excuse a violation. Academic dishonesty will result in a course grade of F.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

We strive to be an inclusive community for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodations for any type of disability should contact me in consultation with the EAD Office.

Schedule (subject to change)

Jan. 8—Course Introduction

Jan. 15—Ethics of Dialogue

BEFORE CLASS

READ: Introduction to Cosmopolitanism in Education
Dialogue with Evil

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT

IN CLASS

Discuss readings, share personal political orientation/philosophy, vote on potentially polarizing issue(s) to focus on during course

Jan. 22—Differences between Liberals and Conservatives

BEFORE CLASS

READ: Nature, Nurture and Your Politics
Voting with a Middle Finger
The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT

IN CLASS

Discuss readings, initial discussion of polarizing issue

Jan. 29—Non-Polarizing Discourse

BEFORE CLASS

READ: Complicating the Narrative
Annotated Transcript Case Study

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT

IN CLASS

Discuss readings, reflect on previous discussion, engage in follow-up discussion

Feb. 5—Activism and Dialogue

BEFORE CLASS

READ: Talking with the Enemy
Notes from a Recovering Activist

REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT

IN CLASS

Discuss readings, reflect on previous discussion, choose another polarizing topic

Feb. 12—Issues with Online Communication

BEFORE CLASS

READ: Challenge Everything You Think
“About” sections of tools designed to resist polarization

BRING: Screenshot/transcript of (non)polarizing interaction online, with commentary

IN CLASS

Discuss readings and artifacts, engage in discussion about polarizing issue

Feb. 19—Synthesis and Application

BEFORE CLASS

WRITE: Draft of Working Theory

DIALOGUE PREPARATION

IN CLASS

Reflect on previous discussion, share and discuss drafts, choose final issue to discuss

Feb. 26—Synthesis and Application

BEFORE CLASS

WRITE: Work on Final Paper

DIALOGUE PREPARATION

IN CLASS

Reflect on the semester, final discussion

Final Reflection due by 11:59 PM, Sunday, March 3rd

References for Weekly Readings

Week 2: Ethics of Dialogue

Sabey, D. B., & Leander, K. M. (2019). More connected and more distant than ever: Toward a cosmopolitan ethics of digital literacies. In E. B. Moje & P. Enciso (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume 5*. New York: Routledge.

Sidorkin, A. M. (2002). Dialogue with Evil. *Counterpoints, 173* (Learning Relations: Impure Education, Deschooled Schools, Dialogue with Evil), 185–195.

Week 3: Differences Between Liberals and Conservatives

Haidt, J. (2008). The Moral Roots of Liberal and Conservatives. *TED Talks*. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind/transcript

Vedantam, S. (2018). Nature, Nurture And Your Politics. *Hidden Brain Podcast*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=654127241>

Vedantam, S. (2018). Voting With A Middle Finger: Two Views On The White Working Class. *Hidden Brain Podcast*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/657547685>

Week 4: Non-Polarizing Discourse

Ripley, A. (2018). Complicating the Narratives. Retrieved from The Whole Story website: <https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/complicating-the-narratives-b91ea06ddf63>

Week 5: Activism and Dialogue

Fowler, A., Gamble, N. N., Hogan, F. X., Kogut, M., McCommish, M., & Thorp, B. (2001, January 28). Talking with the Enemy. *The Boston Globe*, p. Focus section.

Gearhart, S. M. (2004). Notes from a Recovering Activist. In K. A. Foss, S. K. Foss, & C. L. Griffin (Eds.), *Readings in Feminist Rhetorical Theory* (pp. 266–270). London: Sage Publications.

Week 6: Issues with Online Communication

Sunstein, C. R. (2017). Challenge Everything You Think - Democracy Depends On It. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/27/challenge-everything-democracy-representative-government>

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

These questions will guide the interview, but it is not a script. The interviewer will follow-up on students' responses and interests, focus on specific moments, and/or refer to video recordings and transcripts.

1. How did you like the discussions we've been having in class? What seems to be going well? What doesn't seem to be going so well?
2. How do these discussions compare to other ones you've had in school or elsewhere?
3. Have you learned anything about how you participate in discussions and what you might do differently?
4. What makes it hard to have good discussions?
5. What is something you learned (a take-away) about discussions involving differences among participants?
6. What parts of your background do you think influenced how you interacted in this class or in a particular discussion (e.g., family, region, race, culture, religion, political formation, etc.)?