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Dialogue as a Means of Learning and Teaching

Richard S. Baskas

Walden University

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine how dialogue is involved in learning and teaching in the classroom. Dialogue is present in many forms as it is used in group interactions, used with technology and how pre-service teachers communicate with their school supervisors during their training. Research was conducted through Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and seven articles were researched and reviewed to examine how dialogue is used in three situations in the classroom. Results revealed that dialogue is an important aspect in the classroom and must be developed quickly and professionally in order to provide the best instruction in the classroom.

Keywords: dialogue, group interactions, technology, pre-service teachers

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Every moment of our conscious lives, dialogue is continuously being involved and constantly progressing as we teach and learn. In order for this form of communication to occur, at least two persons must be involved. According to Gorsky, Casper and Trumper (2004), dialogue occurs if the interaction is “instructor-student or student-student” (p. 268). The purpose of dialogue is to “increase learner understanding, sharpen learners’ analytic skills or as an evaluation tool” (p. 268). How dialogue is used in the classroom depends on the context of the situation, e.g., in group interactions, with technology, and between pre-service teachers and their school supervisors.

Peer Group Interactions

Educators use dialogue in the classroom so that students can interact with each other in peer groups. Bohm (1989) (as cited by Sparrow & Heel, 2006) revealed that dialogue is “a particular form of interaction between people” (p. 153) where it “makes it possible for participants to become aware of some of the hidden or tacit assumptions that derive from culture, language and psychological makeup” (p. 152). This is evident in the classroom setting where educators use this forum for students to participate in discussions. This communication between students can be affected by a number of factors, e.g., how students’ desks are physically arranged in class and if class resources are easily accessible by students. These arrangements can help persuade students to be involved in discussions where they can learn to understand how their peers interact when they question and answer responses from each other. As they interact, they increase “acceptance towards questioning, challenging, inquiring and looking for opportunities to develop team learning” (Sparrow & Heel, 2006, p. 156). To maximize the amount of productive

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interactions among students in the class, teachers should take care in preparing their classrooms to focus on this task.

Technology

Since technology is constantly advancing with the development of numerous types of electronic devices, it provides many opportunities by which dialogue can be utilized in the class. The various forms of these devices provide numerous choices by which educators become creative in delivering their instruction. Ruiz et al. (2006) (as cited by Rhine & Bryant, 2007) found that this type of environment shifts dialogue “from a passive, teacher-centered model to one that is active and learner-centered” (p. 346). In order for dialogue to be used successfully with technology, educators must use “modeling, coaching, questioning, reflection and task structures” (MacKnight, 2000, p. 347) in their classrooms in order to support higher levels of reflection. As long as current technology can provide the opportunity of enhancing critical thinking, dialogue must be “carefully structured to support high levels of reflection” (Whipp, 2003, p. 331). If specific goals and thoughtful questions are to be incorporated into these Internet structured sites, discussions can be stimulated and guided (Rhine & Bryant, 2007). As Rhine and Bryant (2007) further surmise, as current technology does not allow for an instant pedagogical response upon instruction, educators can perform and later review their instruction as to what took place and later provide an explanation. On the other hand, Owens’ (1999) research (as cited by Rhine & Bryant, 2007) stated that if students do not have adequate access to technology, they will feel frustrated, preventing them from benefiting from technology related tasks. Baron and McKay (2001) further explained (cited from Rhine & Bryant, 2007) that if students have strong technical skills, they most likely have had more effective and meaningful

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experiences with integration of technology. Current technology can provide more of an interactive environment allowing students to utilize dialogue in many instances.

Pre-service Teachers

As they begin their teaching profession with their university and school supervisors, pre-service teachers will begin to learn how to utilize many forms of dialogue in order to improve their instruction. As technology continues to advance, pre-service teachers have more of an advantage in communicating, due to their training, in order to relay and gain valuable information to improve their instruction. Currently, pre-service teachers need to have access to and become adept users of technology (Dymoke & Hughes, 2009). Kamens' (2000) research (as cited from Rhine & Bryant, 2007) explained that constant collaboration with their supervisors helps to handle stress, develop more confidence and greater self-esteem for the new teacher. Teacher educators can provide action research for pre-service teachers where beginning teachers develop reflective practice and integrate taught theory with actual practice (Smith & Sela, 2005). As long as there is frequent feedback between peers and supervisors, this should help to broaden pre-service teachers' perspectives and nurture their critical reflection regarding their instruction (Dymoke & Hughes, 2009). Dymoke and Hughes (2009) found that online discussions have helped gain an immediate and specific nurturing in pre-service teachers' confidence building as their school supervisors don't have the time for providing feedback. Teachers need to be able to communicate in a number of ways in order for their instruction to become effective.

Conclusion

Research has shown that dialogue can be manipulated in many instances depending on its function. To improve and increase student dialogue during discussions, teachers can arrange their classrooms to promote this activity allowing students to be in constant contact with each

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other. Current technology gives educators many advantages to improve their instruction by providing types of devices to assist their instruction. The most important element in how dialogue can be used in the classroom is how pre-service teachers choose to use them to their advantage. With the many changes with which dialogue is being used, beginning teachers are constantly being challenged to determine the most effective methods of improving their instruction in their classroom.

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