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What Makes Authentic Questions Authentic?

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Abstract
In some approaches to dialogic pedagogy research, authentic questions have long attracted attention, since the prevalence of authentic questions has been used as an indicator of the dialogic quality of classroom activities. However, this article offers an analysis of the concept of authentic questions in the research literature and shows that this concept is less clear than is commonly assumed. For instance, descriptions and definitions offered are very heterogeneous even within particular studies, and classifications of authentic questions vary across research literature. The analysis identifies four different, implicit conceptual elements in "authentic question" — some of which cannot be reconciled. The analysis also identifies an important underlying theme, namely mutual recognition and respect, in descriptions of authentic questions. Accordingly, the article concludes with the recommendation that future research on authentic questions includes this theme explicitly in reflections on the identification of authentic questions.

Keywords: *Authentic questions; Conceptual analysis; Methodology; Teacher-student interaction*

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"Authentic questions" in educational research and practice

There is no clear consensus on how to characterize a dialogue in a classroom discourse and how to study it (e.g., Howe & Abedin, 2013, pp. 326-327; Matusov, 2018). However, since the 1990s, there is a growing body of literature in dialogic pedagogic research that uses "authentic question" as key term. Within this research, the concept of "authentic questions" – together with uptake and level of evaluation – has been taken as an important indicator of the degree of discourse dialogicity (for overviews, see e.g., Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003, pp. 138-139; Reznitskaya & Glina, 2013, pp. 49-50; Skidmore, 2016). A high prevalence of authentic questions in classroom interactions indicates a dialogical discourse. In contrast, traditional instruction has been described as recitation characterized by "closed teacher questions, brief recall answers and minimal feedback that requires children to report someone else's thinking rather than to think for themselves" (Alexander, 2008, p. 93). The dialogic classroom is described as one that is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful (Alexander, 2008, p. 185).

In this body of research, "authentic question" is offered as a clear category, but in this article, I argue that a closer look at the description of authentic questions within this research shows that the term is used in a variety of ways. First, the conceptual definitions of "authentic questions" are entangled with descriptions of their functions and effects. Second, classifications, descriptions and definitions offered are rather heterogeneous and, in some cases, possibly even conflicting. Third, whether a question is authentic appears to be more context-dependent than the definitions let on. And, finally, there are notable differences in descriptions of authentic questions when raised by teachers and authentic questions when raised by students.

The lack of a clear concept of "authentic question" is a problem for this body of theoretical research because concepts are representations of phenomena in the world, and if the definition of a concept is imprecise, it will be unclear what the research examines and concludes. Imprecise concepts are also a problem for the dissemination of research findings to inform teacher education and guide teachers more generally. To help begin addressing the issue, I offer a conceptual analysis of "authentic questions" in educational research. However, I do not pretend to cover all uses of the term "authentic question" across all research literature, so there may be further conceptualizations adding to those I identify here. But I have included various examples of frequently cited works from research with a largely instrumental approach to dialogue (see Matusov, 2018) to illustrate that clarity is absent even within this limited body of empirical research.

My aim is to unpack influential views on what makes an authentic question authentic: What is the conceptual content of the term "authentic question" and can a core definition be discerned? I begin by identifying four kinds of different and partially incompatible conceptual content which influential research has explicitly and implicitly attached to the term "authentic question." Then I turn to differences in descriptions of teacher and student questions, and to divergent ways of classifying authentic questions across research. The article does not, perhaps disappointingly, presume to deliver an improved definition of the term "authentic question," but offers a tentative suggestion of an alternative way of understanding the concept(s) of authentic questions. I conclude with recommendations for future research in the field of dialogic pedagogy.

Conceptual analysis of 'authentic questions'

How does this research literature define authentic questions? An often cited article states: "We define an authentic question as one for which the asker has not prespecified an answer" (Nystrand et al., 2003, p. 145). The same definition is offered in many other places (Alexander, 2008, p. 104; Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003, p. 700; Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 524; Nystrand, 1997b, p. 38; 2006, p. 400; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a, pp. 261, 272). This description may appear to be a straightforward criterion for whether a question is authentic or not. However, a closer examination of the literature shows that a variety of clarifications, examples and descriptions are routinely added to this definition, making the picture less clear.

In one article, a description of authentic questions adds that they "open the floor to what students have to say," are "open ended," that "[the teacher] doesn't know the answer," that these questions "take students seriously," "encourage and build on what is noteworthy," "clarify ideas," and "prize student opinion and thinking" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991b). In another article, additions include that they are "used to explore different understandings rather than to 'test'...," are "trying to make sense," concern something "on which there may be disagreement," and are "tapping into students' reactions" (Applebee et al., 2003). A third includes that "the teacher is genuinely unsure," that the questions "often overtly seek a student's

opinion," are offered "with interest and enthusiasm," and someone asks them "because they want to know the answer" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011).

Considering how central the term "authentic question" is to this body of research, the variety in these descriptions is striking. "Not having a prespecified answer" may in many cases be close to "not knowing the answer," but the two characterizations are not interchangeable. For instance, I may *know* what my son will say when I ask him if he prefers cheese or jam, but that does not mean that I have *prespecified* the answer. And the distance in meaning between "not having a prespecified answer" and "encourage" is even farther. Although these conceptual meanings do not conflict, there is a prima facie case for thinking that the term "authentic question" is less clear than readers are normally led to understand. Therefore, it is necessary to determine whether there really is only one (perhaps fuzzy) concept or whether there are, in fact, several related variants of the concept "authentic questions" implicit in this research.

Four concepts of authenticity

Conceptual analysis can help distinguish between the various layers of meaning attached to the concept of "authentic questions" by comparing explicit and implicit definitions, descriptions and examples in order to identify contradictions, examine possible counterexamples, or possible reconciling interpretations. A philosophical analysis can also help distinguish the conceptual content of "authentic questions" from ideas about a possible instrumental value of authentic questions.

For instance, some descriptions of authentic questions could appear to be part of a definition, while, in fact, they are better understood as part of a theory about these questions (see Petersen, Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, & Hvidtfeldt, 2016, pp. 23-24 for this distinction). For instance, stating that authentic questions allow students to have "real voices" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 529) or "enhance student learning" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 529) is to say something about the expected *effect* of authentic teacher questions. It is not the same as describing defining features, because, first, there are other kinds of teacher strategies that can enhance student learning as well. And second, it is not a necessary condition of something being an authentic question that it must, for instance, enhance student learning: Whether it does this is something that can only be determined empirically, not by definition. For these reasons, researchers who point to characteristics such as these are providing a theoretical account of the functional role of authentic questions in education, but are not providing a definition, and we should disregard these characteristics in the conceptual analysis.

Based on the variations in descriptions and definitions of authentic questions I have found in the body of research literature, I suggest that the notion of "authentic questions" is implicitly a category which, problematically, comprises four kinds of related, but distinguishable, conceptual content:

1) A pedagogical aspect: that authentic questions are something other than test questions
2) An epistemic aspect: that authentic questions are motived by the wish to acquire information
3) A social aspect: that authentic questions are motivated by the wish to know what someone else thinks
4) A content aspect: that authentic questions are about deep puzzles

The pedagogical aspect: Not used for testing purposes

The pedagogical aspect of authentic questions concerns their use, namely that they are not test questions related to curriculum. When asking a pedagogically authentic question, the teacher is not looking for a specific, prespecified answer with specific content. In this sense, the authentic question is contrasted with a "test question" in that it allows an indeterminate number of right answers. This understanding of authenticity is found across literature (Alexander, 2008, p. 104; Applebee et al., 2003, p. 700; Boyd &

Markarian, 2011, pp. 524, 525; Davies, Kiemer, & Meissel, 2017, p. 976; Nystrand, 2006, p. 400; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a, pp. 261, 272; 1997, p. 38; Nystrand et al., 2003, p. 145).

Examples of questions which match this description could be: "What did you think of the story?," "Is it always wrong to lie?," "Was it a difficult assignment?," or "Have you ever heard of Socrates?." The questions may be open-ended ("What did you think of the story?") or linguistically closed ("Have you ever heard of Socrates?"), and some do have specific answers (such as "What did you think of the story?"). But what makes them authentic according to the pedagogical aspect is dependent on teacher intention: The teacher is not looking for a specific answer with the intention of *assessing* the students.

However, as they stand here, all the questions *could*, potentially, be used as test questions (given specific contexts and teacher motivations), so a necessary criterion for being an authentic question according to this aspect, must be that teacher does not *intend* it as a question to test knowledge of the curriculum, moral habitus or skills. This means that it can be very difficult to determine from a transcript whether a question is authentic. But if the question works as an authentic question, it will, presumably, stimulate dialogue, and students' answers will show that they know, or presume that it is not a test question.

The epistemic aspect: Acquiring knowledge

In contrast to the pedagogical aspect, the epistemic aspect of authentic questions is found in situations where the teacher *is* looking for specific information. The epistemic aspect can be seen in examples of descriptions of authentic questions as those where "[the teacher] really doesn't know the answer (e.g. "What's his name?")" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991b, p. 265), where "rather than quizzing each other, the conversants only exchange that information they actually need to know" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991b, p. 268), where teachers ask "to find out about these things" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991b, p. 270). Students can also ask these kinds of questions because they are "trying to make sense" of something the teacher said (Applebee et al., 2003, p. 710), and "because they want to know the answer" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 528). So, while the pedagogical aspect is concerned with supporting dialogue by not asking for specific already known answers, there is also an epistemic aspect of authentic questions relating to an interest in knowing the answer.

Examples of questions which fit the description of the epistemic aspect could include "Have you ever heard of Socrates?," "Where do you see that in the text?," "Where did your parents grow up?," or "What made you answer '4' in assignment b?." They can be open-ended, asking about complex facts ("What made you answer that?") or closed-ended, asking about a specific fact (such as a name). The questions illustrate the epistemic aspect because the person asking them expects that there are specific answers and wants to know what they are.

Like with the pedagogical aspect of authentic questions, however, the epistemic aspect makes authentic questions dependent on teacher intentions. The syntactically same question can cease to be authentic if it is intended as a question which is actually used to, for instance, test a student: "Where do you see that in the text?" could become a rhetorical test question for a student who is not putting the expected amount of effort in the work. Moreover, if authentic questions are dependent on the knowledge of the one asking, the same question (such as "How much gold has been mined in the world so far?") could be authentic for a teacher in the morning, but not authentic later in the day after a spell of googling. This contextual effect would also make it impossible to determine from a transcript of classroom discourse whether the question was authentic or not.

The social aspect: Interest in what another person thinks

The difference between the epistemic and social aspects of authentic questions is that the first is concerned with the need to know the answer to the question, while the second is about social relatedness in the form of an interest in the *person* who is giving the answer. This social aspect can be seen in descriptions of authentic questions as those where "teachers take students seriously" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991b, p. 266), which "signal to the students the teacher's interest in what students think and know" and "open the floor to what students have to say" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a, pp. 265, 266, 283; Nystrand et al., 2003, p. 145). The authentic questions "overtly seek a student's opinion" and "allow students to have real voices" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, pp. 525, 529) and the person asking is "genuinely interested in in knowing how others will answer" (Davies et al., 2017, p. 976).

Examples of authentic questions that correspond to this description could be: "Do you consider the protagonist is a hero?," "What did you think of the election results yesterday?," or "Have you ever been deprived of freedom?" (see Dysthe, 1996, p. 403 for the last example). Questions like these signal an interest in the student – not only because the student knows specific facts, but also as a person with ideas and opinions. Unlike the pedagogical and epistemic aspects of authentic questions, the social aspect would make it impossible to use wordings of a question like "What did you make of the election results?" as a test question (unless assuming an unethically insincere attitude in the teacher asking). The social aspect requires that the question comes across as motivated by a sincere interest in the person's opinions, not as motivated primarily by getting new information about a fact.

However, these examples I have used to illustrate the idea of a social aspect of authentic questions can be read in two ways: as questions motivated by an interest in student opinion as such, or as questions motivated by interest in student opinion as a contribution to a dialogue about something. The difference can be seen in questions such as "What makes you think Paris is located in Texas?" or "Why do you think the rabbit lied in the story?," which can be used either to understand how the student thinks, or to inform a dialogue about Paris or a story. If taken in the first way, there is a matter of the fact and a correct answer to the question, because the student thinks in a specific way. If taken in the second way, there is also a correct answer to the question about where Paris is. But if the question about the rabbit is taken in the second sense, there is not a fact of the matter in the same way – rather, this literary question could be a deeper question allowing for multiple relevant answers. And this leads us to the final aspect of authentic questions.

The content aspect: Motivated by deep puzzles

The content aspect of authentic questions is distinct from the epistemic aspect in that it is not relative to what speakers know, and it is distinct from the social aspect in that it is not motivated by wish to be informed on someone's opinion. Instead, the content aspect is related to the matter of the dialogue and especially to whether it is a difficult question that does not have a definite answer which someone (or Google) can supply. Like the social aspect of authentic questions, the content aspect of authentic questions also means that questions with this aspect cannot be turned into test questions in any meaningful way. In contrast to questions such as "What is his name?," "How much gold is in the world?" or "What is your view on the election?," all of which have specific answers that the teacher perhaps just happens to not know, authentic questions in this description are concerned with deeper, philosophical puzzles such as "What is freedom?" or "Is freedom more important than having a job and economic stability?" (examples from Dysthe, 1996, p. 403).

In the case of such questions, the answers are unknown to all, and it is even unclear if there exists or could exist a definite fact of the matter. I have not found this aspect of authenticity explicitly articulated

in the literature cited so far, but only in examples. But it may be what lies behind the definition that "Authentic questions are moments when the teacher is genuinely unsure of the answer to [their] question" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 525), although this is also compatible with the epistemic aspect (and questions concerned with factual content). It could also be what is hinted at in a seminal article which distinguishes between "the teacher as evaluator" and "the importance of 'coverage' of content rather than mutual exploration of interpretations" (Langer & Applebee, 1986, p. 185), because the latter category leaves it open whether there is a fact of the matter.

Clear examples of authentic questions when it comes to content are classical philosophical questions such as "What is it to be a hero?," "Is it always wrong to lie?," "Does morality depend on religion?," or "Are you the same person throughout life?." Although these questions could be accompanied by a test attitude, this is (hopefully) unlikely as these are fundamentally open in nature. I would argue that the content aspect would normally make it possible to identify authentic questions in a transcript without knowing the context or the motivation of the teacher.

This content aspect differs from the other aspects of authentic questions described here. First, it is not merely a question of suspending correctness evaluation as in the pedagogical aspect, but the question also implies that there are more ways to answer (and perhaps that you should be prepared to provide reasons for your views). The content aspect also differs from the epistemic aspect of authentic questions in that the person asked is never expected to fully know and to be able to provide a definite answer. And finally, the content aspect is dissimilar to the social aspect of authentic questions, because the content aspect is related to interest is in the matter the question concerns, not in the person attempting to answer the question.

So the content aspect of authentic questions differs from the other aspects of authentic questions, but it links to the wish to know in epistemic aspect: They are used to "explore different understandings rather than to test" (Applebee et al., 2003, p. 690). It also links to the wish to include different voices in the social aspect, because it explains why one would usually only ask authentic questions of people one recognizes as "knowledgeable," "with 'lived through' experience," and "expertise worth sharing" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a, p. 283). Table 1 below provides an overview of the main similarities and differences between the four aspects identified in descriptions and examples of authentic questions.

Table 1: The four aspects of authentic questions

characteristic *aspect of authentic question*	not intended as test question	there is a fact of the matter one can ask for	interested in knowing what a person thinks	a question where the fact of the matter is unknown to everyone
pedagogical aspect	X	-	-	-
epistemic aspect	X	X	-	-
social aspect	X	X	X	-
content aspect	X	-	-	X

The above discussion and table show that it is possible to distinguish between four different implicit, conceptual aspects of authentic questions in the body of research literature examined here. It also shows

that seemingly identical questions should be categorized differently depending on teacher intention and similar contextual factors. The following sections show additional reasons that the concept of authentic questions is less clear than is commonly assumed within this research.

Inconsistency regarding authentic questions from teachers and students

The incoherence between the various descriptions and examples of authentic questions is a sign that conceptual analysis is necessary. Another sign is the inconsistency which can be seen in descriptions of authentic questions posed by teachers compared with descriptions of authentic questions posed by students. In contrast to teacher questions, research literature generally describes student questions as always authentic. For instance, a question is classified as authentic in a case of a "student trying to make sense of [something] the teacher describes" (Applebee et al., 2003, p. 710), and it has been argued that students "always ask authentic questions – unless they are role playing a teacher" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a, p. 272), and that student-generated questions are all authentic "because they want to know the answer" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 528).

This is puzzling, as it seems to imply that the definition of authentic questions varies relative to speakers. First, it appears that authentic student questions are compatible with pre-specified teacher answers. In fact, the reason students ask the teacher to clarify is probably that they know that there is a fact of the matter one can ask for, so this is at odds with the pedagogical aspect of authentic questions. Second, there is no sign that student questions are concerned with interest in teachers' trail of thoughts or similar, so it is also at odds with the social aspect of authentic questions. And third, it is at odds with the content aspect of authentic question, either because there is a definite answer or at least that the question is not always about a deep puzzle. The epistemic aspect of authentic questions that appears to be what is supposed to make the student question authentic. But it would be a stretch to assume that students are always truly invested in the answer, when they ask a teacher to clarify – they may just be looking for "the right answer" (see, e.g., Hargreaves, 2015 on effects of traditional school culture on children).

Some believe they have observed a difference between the questions students ask of teachers compared to student questions for peers: "in collaborative work among peers in small groups, all the questions are asked by students, are authentic, and typically exhibit uptake" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a, p. 265). But even if this is the case, it does not mean that the definition of authentic questions should change. So when different definitions of authentic questions in teachers and students, respectively, are explicitly provided (e.g. Boyd & Markarian, 2011, pp. 525, 528), this at least deserves an explanation. Compared to the focus on authentic teacher questions in the body of research, there is only little discussion of authentic student questions, so this discussion appears worth pursuing more. And more generally, given all the inconsistencies shown here, it is no surprise that it is difficult to classify authentic questions. The following section provides examples of the difficulties involved.

Classification

Although all four aspects of authentic questions are related to the necessary characteristic in that they are not intended as test questions, the four aspects are arguably also very different in kind and they can be distinguished analytically if not always in practice or in a transcript. For instance, a specific question such as "Do you think the protagonist is a good example of a hero?" can be understood in several ways depending on whether the emphasis is put on the pedagogical aspect (not a test question), the epistemic aspect (asking to find out information about the matter of fact), the social aspect (asking because of interest in the person's thinking), and or the content aspect (about the deep question of what it is to be a hero). But the aspects in fact determine the intended meaning of the question.

So all the aspects could be read into a single, specific question, and this means that linguistic form alone cannot not help us classify, because much depends on intention and context behind the question (cf. Alexander, 2018, pp. 25-26, on educational setting and purpose; Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 516, on how questions are received; Nystrand, 1997b, p. 7, on hidden agendas etc.; Nystrand et al., 2003, p. 145, on classroom context). For these reasons, it is possible that the question about the protagonist could, in fact, be an instantiation of any combination of the four (or none of them).

In addition to these classification challenges, the field is also inconsistent in describing how authentic questions relate to other kinds of questions. For instance, some appear to see "open" and "open-ended" questions as a category distinct from authentic questions (e.g., Alexander, 2018; Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Reznitskaya, 2012) while others use the "open ended" questions as a form of authentic questions (e.g., Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991b). Sometimes the two appear to be equivalent (e.g., Nystrand, 2006), and sometimes open questions are seen as "questions where they [teachers] do not already know the answer" (Esiyok, 2016, p. 113).

It would seem desirable to distinguish between the authentic and open questions. A way of doing this could be by categorizing them not only by syntax, but also by content. For instance, the question "What can you tell me about mammals?" is grammatically open, but conceptually closed (Worley, 2015), because there are clear right and wrong boundaries to acceptable answers. In contrast, "Is lying always wrong?" is a philosophical question that is a grammatically closed yes/no question, but a conceptually open question. This fits with the idea that "[o]pen questions are those that have multiple acceptable answers and often overtly seek a student's opinion" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 525) but are not the same as authentic questions. It may also be in line with the idea of some questions being "quasi-authentic" in that they "allow students some latitude" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a, p. 272), or questions that are "open," but not "truly open" (Reznitskaya, 2012, p. 450).

Another helpful base for further reflection is the tentative conclusion from the conceptual analysis that intentions are a critical defining feature of authentic questions. This is seen from the discussion of the various descriptions of authentic questions, but also from the remarks that classification of authentic questions is context-dependent (and so can not necessarily be determined from a transcript). It can be difficult to determine whether a specific question is authentic or not, and in such cases, some researchers have suggested that a last resort can be to consult the teacher when the authenticity of a question is unclear (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997, p. 37; Nystrand et al., 2003, p. 145).

However, this practical classification strategy may give rise to new difficulties. These difficulties arise because, first, it is not clear that teachers always are able to provide precise reports on their intentions, and second, because this seems to imply that the effect of an authentic teacher question is independent of student perception of the intention and the context of the social relation. These concerns should lead us to consider the possibility of a revision of the concept based on the conceptual analysis.

A revised concept of authentic questions?

The conceptual analysis of the implicit notion of "authentic question" in this body of research shows that even if all authentic questions are related by not being test questions used for evaluation, distinctive important aspects can be identified as well. And these aspects are not always easily reconciled because they involve contrasting descriptions of authentic questions (such as whether there is a fact of the matter or not). So, is there "a magical ingredient" in authentic questions? Is there something which can unite all the aspects as the defining feature, or are there several different ways of qualifying as an authentic question? To begin to answer these questions, we need a clearer definition of what makes authentic

questions authentic. This is important for empirical research in order to know what variables we are studying, and it is important for providing the appropriate guidelines and tools for teachers.

However, it would be impossible within the space of this article to discuss whether a clear and coherent comment of authentic questions could be introduced and made operationalizable for empirical research. Instead, I will point to some additional observations about authentic questions and dialogic pedagogy, and offer some tentative suggestions of directions that further research could take.

Arguably, the four possible aspects of authentic questions I have identified could pick out phenomena that are very different epistemically and inter-personally, and this is relevant for researchers interested in the effects of dialogic pedagogy. It may be that the kinds of questions mentioned as examples have the same effect on classroom dialogue simply because they are all intended as something other than test-questions (i.e., the pedagogical aspect), but it may also be that they have very different effects relative to traits picked out by other aspects. And compare the analogy of research on the effect of parents *not* shouting at their children as a default way of communication: it will not do simply to note whether they shout or not, because it makes a big difference what alternative forms of communication are going on, how and what is being said, what the child thinks, and what the circumstances of the situation are.

This analogy illustrates that a negative definition (i.e., stating what authentic questions are not) will not suffice. We need to identify "the magical ingredient" as well to clearly define what makes authentic questions authentic. Whether this is at all possible would require further studies, but a closer look at the research literature suggests that particular variants of authentic questions are implicitly treated as more significant, namely variants related to recognizing the student as a person.

First, when an article states that "Only authentic discourse can engage students" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997, p. 72) this helps us identify the defining feature, as not all questions that live up to the epistemic aspect (such has "What's your name?") will guarantee engagement. Second, the research literature often mentions the importance of the inter-personal effect of the questions: "In this kind of classroom talk, teachers take their students seriously" (Nystrand, 1997a, p. 7). A similar student-teacher relation is pointed to in this description of a specific teacher: "allowing his students to have real voices as they consider real purposes in real contexts, [the teacher] listens to what his students already know and anchors his questions and comments in their contributions, aligning illocutionary force and educational purpose" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 529). Third, the same article also states that this teacher offers authentic questions "with interest and enthusiasm" and "must listen" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, pp. 526-527). These are all descriptions of a relationship between teacher and student based on mutual recognition, respect and display of interest.

These descriptions of effects and uses of authentic questions are related to the social aspect I have identified, and this may indicate that it would be worthwhile to explore the social aspect more. Some researchers have focused on how different modes of teacher questions and responses can affect the level of social distance between teacher and student (Wells, 1999, pp. 242-243) and how a dialogic approach positions students as thinkers and learners in their own right (Alexander, 2008, p. 15). What brings these approaches together is the underlying ideal of a classroom environment where students are recognized as individual, autonomous persons. Experiencing mutual recognition is of fundamental importance for human thriving and student learning (Altmeyer, 2018; Huttunen & Murphy, 2012; Masschelein, 1991; Wulf, Bittner, Clemens, & Kellermann, 2012), but it has also been noted that there has been a "relative lack of attention to the affective conditions for learning" (Skidmore, 2016, p. 107). I would suggest that perhaps affective conditions, such as feeling well-being and experiencing mutual recognition, have, in fact, been at the core of the search for authentic questions and truly dialogic pedagogy the whole time.

If the magical ingredient in authentic questions is best characterized as a question where the teacher asking the question respects and appreciates the students as thinkers and learners in their own right (and the students sense that this is the case), then it could help explain why researchers have appealed to contexts (such as functions and teacher intentions) in determining unclear cases in coding, why grammatical phrasing or syntax is less important, and how otherwise incompatible descriptions of authentic questions (with/without definite answers) can all be valid variants of the same kind of teacher student relation captured by the term "authentic question."

It should also be noted that several studies have in fact suggested that student participation could be more dependent on the teacher's involvement and mutual respect in the classroom than on the kinds of questions the teacher asks (Boyd & Rubin, 2006, pp. 165-166; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001, pp. 258-260; Kachur & Prendergast, 1997). But this has not led to a closer examination of the relationship between authentic questions and classroom respect or to integration of insights from educational research on dialogic pedagogy with research on recognition and respect. I suggest that this could be relevant.

A question remains whether test questions actually *could* be compatible with this understanding of authentic questions, but this will be for empirical research to decide as it hinges on whether it is possible for students to experience (certain kinds of) test questions as appreciative rather than a tool for evaluation. This would, of course, go against the common definition of authentic questions as contrasting test questions, and so this would be an important point to determine.

A clearer concept of authentic question will be helpful to teachers who look to guidelines for dialogic classroom pedagogy. Researchers in the field have pointed out that there is currently no direct line from research to advise for teachers: "In our own previous research, for example, we have concluded that teachers will do well to ask their students authentic questions. Yet this kind of advice, sound as it may be, has limitations for teachers who must figure out how and when best to do it" (Nystrand, Wu et al., 2003: 190-191). The same researcher further suggests that "What has been missing is a general understanding of how effective classroom discourse unfolds, how it is initiated, and just what the teacher's role is in shaping it" (Nystrand et al., 2003, p. 191). I suggest that it might also be helpful for teachers to see the underlying theme of recognition, appreciation and a possible link to authentic questions.

Concluding remarks

For the superficial observer, dialogue is just a series of verbal exchanges, and a classroom discourse with many such interactions will appear dialogical. But as research in dialogic pedagogy has shown us, it is necessary to be more precise in what constitutes actual dialogue and what merely looks like it. It may be easy for the participant to feel the difference, but how do we pinpoint the necessary elements, identify them in transcripts, and explain them to educators? Authentic questions have played an important role in attempts to answer this question, especially in research advocating dialogic pedagogy to promote learning (see Matusov, 2018) for a comparison of this approach and non-instrumental approaches). But in this article, I have argued that we need to revisit the term and the way it is used in this body of research.

The concept of authentic questions is only important both for conducting research and for providing pedagogical advice for classroom teachers if we know what makes authentic questions authentic. I have argued that the term "authentic question" as it is currently used in educational research literature in fact covers a very complex and unclear concept with at least four different aspects. I have compared and classified definitions and descriptions of authentic questions and their effects, compared authentic questions from teachers with authentic questions from students, and shown how categorizations of authentic questions differ when compared to related terms such as "open questions."

The four different, implicit meanings uncovered are not easily reconciled and, in some cases, they are even incompatible. I suggest, however, that it could be that they are all attempts to identify teacher questions that are accompanied by recognition of and respect for the student as a person, rather than questions being used to test the student. This view may explain several apparent contradictions in the literature, but it also leads to new questions of how best to identify the variables that characterize dialogic pedagogy.

For this reason, I suggest that future research on authentic questions include the theme of recognition explicitly in reflections on identification of authentic questions. Perhaps something can be gained from looking to, for instance, philosophical and psychological studies in respect and recognition (see, e.g., Huttunen & Heikkinen, 2004; Iser, 2019; Renger & Simon, 2011, pp. 501-502) or to practices like Philosophy with Children, which have worked to engage children and students in philosophical dialogues (see, e.g., Kennedy & Kennedy, 2011; Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011). Or perhaps my analysis points to more radical choices regarding the way we conceive of authentic questions – for instance that they cannot be defined and operationalized outside the totality of the learning context. It would be impossible to settle the problem about what – if anything – makes authentic questions authentic within the space of this article. But realizing that the current level of clarity is insufficient is an important first step. A more precise concept of authentic questions will benefit not only research, but also teachers who look to guidelines for dialogic classroom pedagogy.

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