Learning to Talk/Talking to Learn: Teaching Critical Dialogue

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Critical dialogue skills are a beneficial tool for reflective educational practice. Pre-service teachers can learn to examine underlying biases and assumptions that influence many important aspects of educational practice. Critical dialogue skills are thus of particular importance for work with diverse students and their families. This paper outlines procedures and practices instructors can use to teach critical dialogue skills to pre-service teachers. The challenges and pitfalls involved in teaching critical dialogue are discussed. A four-step process, based on the author's research, is explained in detail. Finally, important recommendations for those interested in teaching critical dialogue are outlined. Additional resources and a group evaluation checklist are included at the end of the document.

Keywords: Reflective teaching, preservice teacher education, critical thinking, critical dialogue, teacher collaboration, transformative learning, social bias, critical incidents method

Recently in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* I read, "Students have become so focused on their personal likes and dislikes that they tend to discount the importance of objective reality and the wider world," (Davis, 2005, B13). Davis' words mirror a common concern in teacher education: we are acutely aware that pre-service teachers often rely on personal preference and opinion, rather than broader-based knowledge, to determine teaching actions. We ask pre-service teachers to engage in self-reflection and self-analysis of teaching throughout their preparation. We know that as schools becomes more diverse, the need for self-reflection is more important than ever, in part, so that teachers can become culturally competent. Cultural competence requires ongoing personal examination of values and assumptions made about student behaviors, families, and motivations. Such individual self-examination is, in fact, seen by multicultural psychologists as the first and most important aspect of working with diverse people (Sue & Sue, 2003), but it is not enough.

Public education must, at risk of its own peril, provide quality teaching to all students. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires students of diverse racial, ethnic, and economic groups achieve at levels commensurate with more mainstream or privileged peers. At the same time, classrooms have become less homogenous. Perhaps seldom before have teachers been as challenged to set aside their own perspectives and entertain new ideas about equitable education. Many problems must be solved in order for public education to provide all students with equitable and meaningful education, and educators will need to do more than examine their own assumptions. Solving increasingly complex problems will require that educators collaborate with peers in meaningful ways and work together to find solutions. To fail to do so will be a failure to address the central purpose of education in a democracy. As Marilyn Cochran-Smith recently pointed out, " . . . learning to teach for social justice is a matter for all the participants in teacher education. . . working together as teachers but also as learners, and as educators but also activists, within inquiry communities that extend over the long haul and across the professional life span," (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 12).

The inquiry communities Cochran-Smith describes will require educators to collaborate with colleagues for mutual examination of teaching practices. Educators will need to go beyond solitary reflective practice, currently among the most popular methods for analyzing teaching, and most usually recommended to pre-service teachers. Collaborative inquiry will require new skills that go beyond what we now think of as reflection. Collaborative inquiry, of which critical dialogue is a variant, is like "super-reflection"-- teaching practices and policies are examined not by one, but by many.

Even helping many pre-service teachers develop traditional reflective skills can be a daunting task. Many times our students are "traditional" students—many in their early 20's—and are yet developing important cognitive skills. They frequently engage in dualistic thinking (Perry, 1970; 1981). As articulated by Dianna Kuhn (1999) in her developmental model for critical thinking, even many older adults fail to carefully examine their beliefs. "Rather than seeing their theories as belief states subject to disconfirmation and representing theory and evidence as distinct entities to be

reconciled with one another, they merge the two into a single representation of 'the way things are' with little apparent awareness of the sources of their belief," (Kuhn, p 21). In short, many pre-service teachers need assistance in learning how to examine their thinking. In particular, they must learn to identify the thoughts that guide their actions, and furthermore, must examine and critique the sources of those thoughts to determine their validity. It is for these reasons that many teacher preparation programs so deliberately incorporate elements of reflective analysis into learning experiences.

In this paper I describe a process for using one important reflective practice tool: critical dialogue. It is not the purview of this paper to prove the benefits of this skill, since its benefits have been elsewhere explored (Hicks, 1996; Mezirow, 2000; Moyles, Adams, & Musgrove, 2002; Takeda & Marchel, 2005). Rather, I outline practices for teaching students to use the tool of critical dialogue, so that others interested in teaching these skills may do so. I will provide a brief discussion of critical dialogue, situating it within the reflective practice domain.

What is Critical Dialogue?

By definition, critical dialogue is the ongoing "collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that comprise everyday life," (Schein, 1993). While a variant of reflective practice, critical dialogue around teaching differs in two ways from reflective analysis of teaching as it is commonly taught in pre-service teacher preparation. First, it pays particular attention to the role of personal bias, especially with regard to patterns of power and privilege. Second, critical dialogue is a collaborative act in which peers assist each other in mutual examination of biases. This collaboration is necessary because assumptions and biases are too easily overlooked in solitary reflection, especially when applied to situations where race, ethnicity, or economic status privilege one group over another.

Critical dialogue in schools occurs when educators discuss teaching incidents and challenges with their peers in order to scrutinize personal experience and to avoid biased interpretations and actions in teaching. In this practice, educators learn to communicate with peers in ways that promote the examination of personal thoughts that influence their educational practice. Ongoing dialogue helps educators work together to improve teaching, to solve problems presented by the ongoing challenges of classroom

life, and to reshape school culture and practices. Critical dialogue requires: 1) awareness of the ways personal biases can influence thinking; 2) understanding language as a tool for learning rather than only expression of ideas; and 3) specific skills in speaking and listening in order to promote mutual learning. These are not skills with which most people are naturally gifted, or ones they use in much of their normal discourse. Critical dialogue is a process that can be learned, but it must be taught and practiced.

Critical dialogue has a long history in adult education, and it takes many forms (Mezirow, 1998; Mezirow, 2000). Many trace the use of dialogue for transformative thinking and practice to Friere (1990), who linked meaningful changes in thinking with an awareness of social contexts and the call for political action. The use of dialogue as a tool for change has also taken root in industrial organization (Isaacs, 1993, 2001; Schein, 1993, Schön, 1983), and to a lesser extent, in education (Takeda, Marchel, & Gaddis, 2002). Critical dialogue has been linked to action research, especially where multiple stakeholders work together on shared problems (Reason, 1994; Marchel & Gaddis, 1998) and evidence-informed practice (Moyles, Adams, & Musgrove, 2002). Finally, the collaborative format of critical dialogue goes beyond simple self-reflection because in the former, peer interactions provide scaffolds that support and guide reflection. I will discuss this important aspect of critical dialogue next.

CRITICAL DIALOGUE AS A SCAFFOLD FOR REFLECTION

In critical dialogue, the spoken word provides a strong scaffold for reflective thinking (Takeda & Marchel, 2005). Works of Vygotsky and more recently, Bahktin, (see references listed in "Philosophical/theoretical Underpinnings" section at the end of the paper), have underscored the mediating role of language in constructing knowledge (Hicks, 1996). Vygotsky's ideas, comprising the bedrock of sociocultural theory, suggest the important influence of culture and experience on cognitive development. Based on this work, educators and psychologists have studied ways culture influences thinking, and further, how language mediates culturally situated learning (Donato & McCormick, 1996; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996;). In short, language shapes thinking. Language used in thoughtful, deliberate ways can develop higher level thinking, but because language

is embedded in culture, thinking is embedded in culture as well. With the assistance of objective peers, the influences of culture and experience can be explored through the use of language. This is the basis for critical dialogue. When peers are trained to use prompts that explore thinking, pre-service teachers begin to understand how their own experiences and cultures shape their interpretations and further, begin to reinterpret classroom events in ways that allow for new approaches. External sources of language help overcome the cultural bias of personal reflection.

The difficulty inherent in examining personal biases and assumptions is well known, further highlighting the need for external supports during the process. Numerous studies illustrate the difficulties involved in changing teacher thinking (Brownlee, 2003; Lavonen, 2004). Ideas about how to teach are often formed early in life and strongly held, unless challenged by experience (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004; Timmerman, 2004.) Even when aware of research supporting best practices, teachers may or may not apply methods and practices shown to have efficacy (Pajares, 1992). One reason is that teachers, like many, fail to examine their own thinking and behavior, instead operating on personal likes and dislikes. Also, being able to think critically does not mean the skill will be consistently applied, a phenomenon notably observed in pre-service teachers (McBride, Xiang, & Wittenburg, 2002). Personal biases influence all aspects of teaching: how a situation is interpreted, what interventions are tried, the appraisal of intervention, and even whether or not an important aspect of teaching receives even passing notice. Methods for the examination of personal bias are necessary for teachers.

Why are critical dialogue skills not a common fixture in teacher education programs? Good reasons may exist. While fostering student critical thinking is challenging, this difficulty is made even more visible when situated in dialogue about teaching. Reflection using written formats allows students more time in which to think than does dialogue—making the latter more challenging for students. Also, fewer instructors themselves may be aware of the use of dialogue as a tool for reflection. Where reflective writing and self-analysis is solitary, reflection through dialogue implies collaborative analysis—a potentially more

intimidating situation for pre-service teachers. Finally, teaching reflective dialogue requires new ways of listening and speaking that must be taught (Marchel & Takeda, in review).
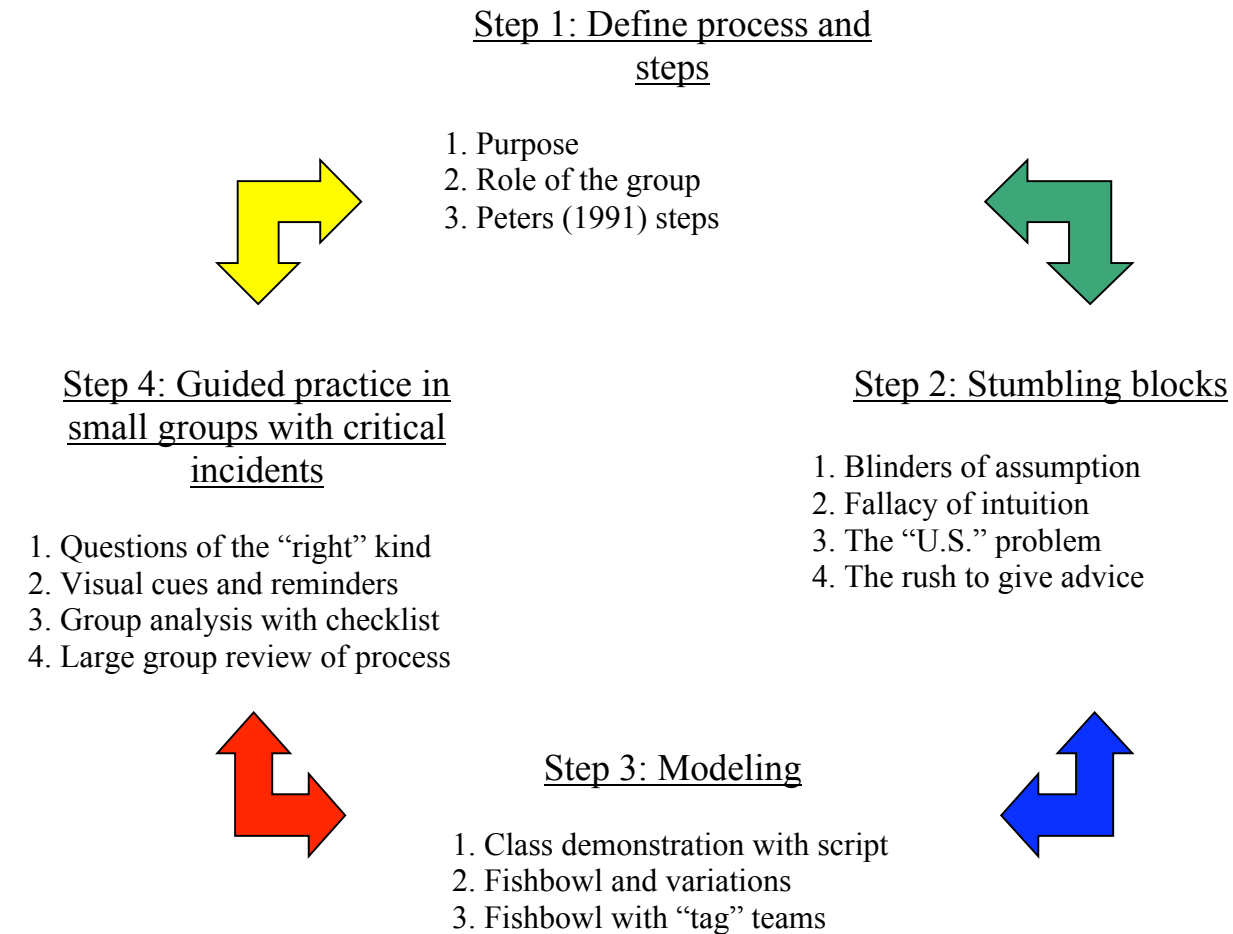
Pre-service teachers can learn to speak with peers in ways that will foster critical self-reflection, but they must be taught. Below, I outline important methods for teaching this skill.

TEACHING CRITICAL DIALOGUE: A FOUR-STEP MODEL

What follows is a description of the methods I have used to support critically reflective dialogue in my own teaching. These ideas come from multiple literatures: counseling, adult education, developmental models of critical thinking, and service-learning. Some result from my accumulated experience and research in the above areas and some from my collaborative cross-cultural research with Dr. Takeda at Kanda University in Japan (Marchel, 2004; Marchel, 2003). Most recently, I used an action research model to gather information on the process during one semester's work with pre-service teachers during their internship. I collected weekly information cards filled out by each student to monitor their learning, held focus groups, and used participant observation, document analysis, and pre-post administration of a critical thinking inventory to understand how students learn critical thinking skills. At the end of the article is a list of further suggested readings, as well as a checklist I use to have students evaluate the processes in their dialogue groups.

While multiple and repeated methods are used to teach critical dialogue, it is vital to begin by defining the concept, the first of a four-step reiterative approach in which the instructor should:

1. Carefully define the concept of critical dialogue and explain its purpose,

2. Discuss the four stumbling blocks to critical dialogue,

3. Model the use of critical dialogue, and finally,

4. Provide supportive practice with peers by sharing critical incidents.

Step 1: Define process and
steps

1. Purpose
2. Role of the group
3. Peters (1991) steps

Step 4: Guided practice in
small groups with critical
incidents

1. Questions of the "right" kind
2. Visual cues and reminders
3. Group analysis with checklist
4. Large group review of process

Step 2: Stumbling blocks

1. Blinders of assumption
2. Fallacy of intuition
3. The "U.S." problem
4. The rush to give advice

Step 3: Modeling

1. Class demonstration with script
2. Fishbowl and variations
3. Fishbowl with "tag" teams

Step I: Defining Critical Dialogue

Pre-service teachers must understand that critical dialogue is about examination of personal bias. They first need a simple definition (for example, "Critical dialogue is talking in groups about teaching challenges in order to get new perspectives on challenging situations"), but it is important even at this stage to draw attention to the pervasive role of bias in making teaching decisions. I call this "the bias factor," because students often get caught up in problem-solving and forget that they must constantly question the sources of their ideas. Students often do not fully appreciate the hidden nature of bias, an idea they must understand if critical dialogue practice is to be successful. Case studies illustrating the role of bias in teaching are useful (see Smith, 1998, pp. 10-16). Comparing and contrasting critical dialogue with other forms of communication with peers, and with traditional reflective analysis, is also helpful. Role play contrasting critical dialogue with "traditional"

teacher dialogue can also assist in illustrating the difference.

During the definition phase, students must also come to understand why group dialogue is necessary for examination of personal biases that often informs teaching practice. They often view peer collaboration mainly as a process in which peers express empathy or offer ideas, and must learn that the primary role of peers in a critical dialogue group serves a very different purpose—that of aiding self-reflection. It is important that instructors teaching the process to students are themselves versed in these matters (see "Further Readings" at the end of this article.)

When defining critically reflective dialogue with students, I find it helpful to draw on the work of Peters (1991) who describes the process of critical reflection in steps: 1) identifying one's assumptions and feelings associated with teaching and students; 2) theorizing how these assumptions and feelings

affect teaching practice, and 3) acting on the basis of the resulting theory of practice.

After listing the steps and discussing them with students, I present the important goal of critically reflective dialogue as that of <u>examination of thinking in order to</u> <u>make the best educational decisions for all students, taking into account the contexts of culture and privilege as influences on teaching decisions</u>. I ask students to suggest examples of challenging situations they have encountered in teaching. In the discussion, students often identify issues of race, socio-economic status, and diverse abilities as being at the core of teaching challenges. We discuss the difficulties inherent in understanding the perspective of others with different backgrounds from our own. At this point, I suggest the need for help from thoughtful peers. I add to this, however, that not everyone knows how to talk and listen in ways that will help us most. (Here is a good place to prompt students to discuss the kinds of communication they find helpful or harmful.) Now I present the final piece: the use of <u>communication</u> with peers to help us identify assumptions, analyze how our assumptions might be affecting our practice, and finally formulating acts based on our analysis. At this point, students may not yet grasp fully the process, but the foundation has been built.

Step 2: Understanding the Stumbling Blocks

In my own research and teaching, I have identified several blocks to reflective dialogue. There are at least four common mistakes made when learning to do critical dialogue. They are: 1) the blinders of assumption; 2) the fallacy of instinct: 3) the "US" problem; and 4) the rush to give advice. Not only must instructors of critical dialogue be aware of these blocks, but they must make students aware of them by teaching them explicitly through multiple repetitions. Furthermore, it is necessary to point out each of these as they occur during critical dialogue practice. Below, I discuss each block in detail.

Throughout the process, students need help in evaluating the flaws in their thinking. I provide them with a summary of a short article by Dianne Halpern (2004) on the topic, to help them understand the common errors many people make when analyzing or explaining situations. My handout summarizing Halpern's work is included at the end of this piece, and the downloadable version of Halpern's article is cited in the "How to" list of references in the "Further Reading" list at the end of the document.

Stumbling block 1: Blinders of assumption. Student understanding of the blinders of assumption is central to the process of critical dialogue. Although made aware of the need to examine biases and assumptions in the definition phase, the point must be continually reinforced throughout critical dialogue practice. Pre-service teachers make many unfounded assumptions about learners, the teaching situation, and likely outcomes of actions. Students need to be aware that these assumptions come from years of acculturation, and that we are so comfortable with our own assumptions that we usually fail to recognize we have them. The need for examining assumptions is perhaps the most important point to make with students. It cannot be made often enough and must be frequently repeated throughout working on critical dialogue. When engaging in reflective dialogue, students can be taught to ask the kinds of questions that prompt colleague's examination of assumptions (see "Questions of the Right Kind" in the Group Evaluation Checklist, below). Unless students understand the "blinders" concepts, they often fail to ask the right kinds of questions.

Stumbling block 2: Intuition. The fallacy of intuition is similar, but not exactly like the assumption blinder idea. This idea comes from the common belief that our instincts and intuitions are often right, and that we should therefore trust them. Intuition, or in current psychological research parlance, rapid cognition (Winerman, 2005) refers to our rapid, unconscious thoughts, which lie behind multitudes of our decisions. Intuition differs from unexamined assumptions, because people often report being aware of intuition, sometimes referring to them as "gut feelings." While expertise in a profession increases the likelihood that intuitions will be more accurate or appropriate, pre-service teachers rarely have developed that level of expertise. Also, even for "experts," instinct can be based on unchallenged assumptions that worked in one context, but that no longer apply (Hogarth, 2001). Relying on intuition is even more common in teaching than in many other professions, because teaching decisions are often made quickly, almost tacitly. Such reliance on intuition may explain the finding that teachers often teach the way they were taught (Richardson, 1996). Current research on intuition suggests that intuitions, though strongly felt, may not lead us to the most accurate choices (Kruger, Wirtz, & Miller, 2005). When teaching reflective dialogue, intuition often becomes the source for suggested teaching interventions, and students need to learn to challenge instinctual decisions or suggestions.

Stumbling block 3: The U.S. problem. The need for challenging instincts is related to another common stumbling block—the tendency for students to rush into providing solutions without examining the critical incident carefully. I think of this problem as the "U.S." problem, because in some ways this tendency is rooted in mainstream American communication (Bannister, 2001; Marchel & Takeda, in review). This is not to say that other cultures communicate more effectively than do mainstream U.S. speakers, only that some of the communication styles we tend to adopt in this country are at cross-purposes to those needed in critical dialogue groups. For example, Japanese communication styles challenge their critical dialogue skills differently, through a hesitancy to speak in ways that might be viewed as disrespectful (Takeda & Marchel, 2005).

The U.S. mainstream reinforces a communication style counterproductive to reflective dialogue in several ways (Marchel & Takeda, in review; Takeda & Marchel, 2005; Takeda, Marchel, & Gaddis, 2002). By the time many of our students enter our classrooms, they have learned that it is good to state one's opinion, to be an individual, to speak out. Careful listening is often less valued than speaking, and spoken language is typically used for offering one's own ideas or making a point. Students need much practice in listening and using spoken language to help other speakers examine their own thoughts and ideas. Reflective dialogue involves a new twist on the traditional, culture-bound ways of speaking and listening for many education students, and the first way to help them change is to be sure they understand the "U.S." perspective. Quite often when a speaker is presenting a critical incident, others respond with their own accounts of similar experiences, resulting in little analysis of the original event in question. I specifically warn students to be on the lookout for storytelling—a common practice in many discussion groups.

Stumbling block 4: The rush to give advice. This fourth stumbling block is common to almost all pre-service teachers. It involves giving advice before fully examining the hidden biases underscoring a teaching incident and eagerly coming to the rescue when peers discuss frustrating problems. Invariably, students want to offer help to their colleagues. Their colleagues invite their ideas, and they quickly settle on an action to try. Discussion ended. A rush to advice-giving bypasses the careful analysis of an issue as well as the assumptions underlying it. Furthermore, rapid-fire advice-giving does not allow

students to question the sources of advice or to evaluate its merit based on best practices. When this block is pointed out to students during their practice of dialogue skills, they can often focus their awareness on the problem long enough to avoid or at least delay it. In fact, in subsequent analysis of a dialogue group, students often point out proudly that "we waited at least 10 minutes before we gave advice," (student written comment, Spring 2006).

Step 3: Modeling.

The explanations provided in the first two steps are only a beginning point, a way to lay a foundation for the critical dialogue process. Students at this point have only a vague understanding of the whole process—an "ambiguity about what we were supposed to do," as one student described it.

Class demonstration. Once the foundation for critical dialogue has been laid, (a process that often takes several class periods), students need to witness its use. I enlist the aide of several students to help me demonstrate the dialogue process. I do not train the students beforehand in any way, but do provide a short written narrative describing a critical incident in teaching. All students in the class read the incident, but only the few who have agreed to help me actually participate in the dialogue. Although I eventually ask students to work with their own teaching experiences, it is helpful at first to use one I have created. This is because critical dialogue requires an atmosphere of trust among colleagues, often not yet established early in the semester. Sharing experiences in front of a room of peers can be especially threatening. The use of a fictional account reduces the threat. Although I ask one of the students to read the narrative as if it were their own, it is clearly an act and not intended to get at actual participant perspectives.

Prior to modeling, I cue students to pay attention to the kinds of comments and questions I use, and then demonstrate those likely to result in thoughtful examination of the incident. I also provide students with a checklist to follow during the modeled dialogue (see attached "Group Evaluation Chart."). I allow the dialogue to take whatever direction it will, while I model the use of appropriate skills. In a discussion following the demonstration, I ask students to tell me what they noticed during the dialogue. Did they see any of the stumbling blocks? What kind of questions did I use? How did the others respond? What do they think will be difficult when they try this process? I use this discussion to

create a list of useful questions and comments that I refer to as "questions of the 'right' kind," (see Group Evaluation Checklist.)

The fishbowl and its variations. Because most students find the techniques of critical dialogue unfamiliar, it is sometimes helpful to use a fishbowl technique, in which the instructor and a small group of three to four students demonstrate critical dialogue skills. Fishbowl groups can also be used after students have been in smaller practice groups and become more familiar with some of the challenges of dialogue. When using fishbowls, I have a student present an incident, while I illustrate the kinds of questions and comments that will be helpful in the analysis of the incident. During this demonstration, I gradually begin to "stop the action," and ask students in the class to suggest useful comments, or I ask the group to evaluate the quality of the critical dialogue process so far. I also use these breaks in the action to suggest more helpful comments, or to make my own evaluative comments on the process.

Once students have become somewhat comfortable with the process, I introduce a "tag team" approach, asking students in the audience to tap a fishbowl group member on the shoulder if they want to substitute a useful comment. It is not uncommon for students to be uncomfortable with taking the initiative to "tag" a fishbowl member on their own, so sometimes I signal audience members to "tag" a group member and become a substitute group member, in order for all students to have some guided practice in critical dialogue skills.

A final variation to the fishbowl technique is to appoint two students as monitors before beginning the fishbowl. I assign a different evaluative role to each of these students. One becomes the "Ray of Sunshine," whose job it is to notice all the positive dialogue skills used by fishbowl members. The other student becomes the "Contrary" whose job it is to point out all the areas for improvement in the process. After the group watches the fishbowl for about 5 minutes, I stop the action and ask each of the two appointed students to present their evaluative comments. I repeat this process several times during the fishbowl.

Step 4: Guided Practice

Critical incidents. Central to the teaching of reflective dialogue is the use of critical incidents (Brookfield, 1990). The purpose of analyzing a critical incident is to help the person presenting the incident develop a deeper understanding about his or her own biases and assumptions, and how teaching actions might be affected by unexamined biases and assumptions. In teacher education, the technique can be used as follows:

Working in small groups, pre-service teachers are asked to pick an incident that for some reason stood out to them in their field experience or internship. It is helpful if they write out the incident, attempting to be as self-reflective in their writing as possible. Each participant has an opportunity to present his or her incident to the group, and the group then analyzes the incident. It is through the questions and responses of the group that presenters are able to identify what may be unhelpful perspectives and then make plans for change.

Questions of the "right" kind. Among the most useful speaking skills during dialogue is the command of questions and prompts that encourage others to deeply examine their thinking (Peters, 1991). The content of questions and phrasing of comments is very important during dialogue. Participants in dialogue must learn to use the kinds of questions and comments likely to encourage reflective thinking and conceptual analysis. I call these "questions of the right kind," and explicitly teach students to use them. (I have been told that calling them questions of the "right" kind might be a little strong, but students report that they like the title because it helps them understand the importance of good questions.) Questions of the right kind include both direct questions and prompts: "Tell me more about your thinking," "Explain why you think that," "Explain your thinking to me," "I am curious about why you think that. Can you tell me more about it?" Also included are those questions and prompts that involve others in the conversation: "I wonder what others think about that," "Do any of you have a reaction to that comment?" "Let's all share our perspective on that point." In focus groups used in my research, students reported that my posting of these questions on a screen at the front of the room, as well as on handouts, was the most helpful technique for learning critical dialogue.

When first teaching the use of questions, I give students a slip of paper on which is written one question or prompt. I ask them to use the question or comment at some point in that day's critical incident analysis. It is necessary to acknowledge that they may feel a little uncomfortable reading a comment on a sheet of paper, but I point out that

the intent is to learn to remember and use the comments and that just now we are only practicing. This activity can be easily used in a fishbowl demonstration of the critical dialogue process. I further strengthen student skills by modeling the use of questions myself during ongoing groups, through commenting on the use of questions and prompts in the analysis of the dialogue process, and by occasionally interrupting dialogue to ask students for a question or prompt that might work well at a particular juncture. In my experience, students will learn to use the questions and prompts, but only after modeling and multiple opportunities to use them with supports. The skill of using good questions and comments is more visible to students if they evaluate their dialogue abilities after each group dialogue, using the evaluation prompt: "We have improved on asking questions and the number of questions, and the type of questions before trying to think of solutions."

Visual cues and reminders. Students usually need a great deal of training and support in order to interact as group members in ways that will support the presenter's critical exploration of the incident (Marchel & Gaddis, 1998). At the start of the first dialogue group, as well as during subsequent groups, it is helpful to post reminders, such as:

- Don't rush to give advice.
- Challenge assumption.
- Use questions of the "right" kind.

The reminders are also included on the "Group Evaluation Chart" check sheet students use during groups to analyze the dialogue process at its conclusion.

Group practice with monitoring and interruptions. Once students begin to understand critical dialogue, and have observed a modeled dialogue built around a critical incident, they can begin to try it out themselves. Ideally, the class forms one group, so that all class members can hear instructor comments made during the process. Instructors can rarely determine class size, however, and often classes contain more than the six or eight students that would comprise a good-sized group, so it may be necessary to divide students into several small groups. This can be done either though the use of multiple small groups that all hold dialogue sessions simultaneously, or by dividing the class into one group of discussers and another group of observers. In the case of the latter, each group is given an opportunity to observe and to engage in dialogue. I usually divide students into

multiple small groups and have the "leader" present the first incident because I want all students to have ample opportunities for direct practice.

Whatever the group division and size, the instructor needs to monitor what happens in groups as much as possible. When students are beginning to practice dialogue skills, it is often helpful to interrupt, make comments about the process, point out when students fall into one of the pitfalls, or demonstrate a helpful comment. As students talk, I regularly interrupt them to note questions or comments that might be helpful. I have learned to do more, rather than less, interrupting early in the process, and student responses collected on group analysis sheets indicated that they found my comments and interruptions helpful and not offensive.

Student analysis of the process. Following dialogue groups, it is helpful for students to analyze what happened during the process. Analysis provides me with information about what skills need further support, and also reinforces student learning of those skills. I do analysis in three ways: 1) I have each group fill out the "Group Evaluation Chart" as much as possible during the dialogue, and then in more detail at its end. 2) I have a group discussion in which students describe the process their group used for the preceding dialogue. I ask what skills they used well, what pitfalls they noticed, what kind of questions and comments they used, and then ask for a qualitative rating of the "depth" of their discussion. 3) I ask the critical incident "leader" to send me an e-mail message describing his or her analysis of that day's dialogue.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

No doubt the main lesson I have learned is that the critical dialogue process is difficult for students, and changes to critical thinking come slowly. In the span of one semester, it is unlikely that students' dispositions and skills will shift dramatically. For example, as a pre- and post-test measure, I have used the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CCTDI) (Facionne & Facionne, 1992) to measure students' disposition toward critical thinking. This scale provides information about the inclination or willingness to use critical thinking skills, irregardless of actual skill level. It includes such variables as motivations to seek the truth through questioning, open-mindedness, intellectual curiosity, and confidence in personal reasoning. My students showed no significant changes in pre- and post-semester administrations, and their scores

yielded profiles like those of similar undergraduates (Facionne & Facionne, 1992; Facionne, Sanchez, Facionne, & Gainen; 1995; McBride, Xiang, & Wittenburg, 2002). As with most undergraduates, willingness and honesty in seeking the truth (the "Truth-seeking" variable on the CCTDI) was the weakest scale score for my students, even though the critical dialogue process is based on the importance of meaningful questioning. It is likely that in order to truly impact generalization of critical thinking skills, reflective dialogue must be supported in multiple settings and linked as much as possible to early teaching experiences and field placements. This finding also supports the strong need in pre-service education to emphasize the dangers of unexamined biases and assumptions. Pre-service teachers have difficulty grasping the idea's importance.

A second important lesson is that it is difficult to get students to shift from action-oriented questions to questions that examine thinking. For example, after several class sessions teaching the technique followed by three class sessions of practice, I asked students in my class to keep track of the questions they asked during dialogue. The list below is telling.

- "What's too friendly?"
- "What would you do if there were more students?"
- "What do you feel went wrong?"
- "I have a question on the [lesson] content . . . what was it based on?
- "Have you asked your students how they feel about your teaching?"
- "Do you think you presented enough content?"
- "How have you tried to do the transition differently?"
- "What do you think?"
- "How would you set it up differently?"

I end this article with recommendations based on my own research and practice. Following the reference section, I also provide a list of additional resources, as well as a copy of the Group Evaluation Checklist that contains the "Questions of the Right Kind."

1. Before teaching dialogue skills, make sure students feel comfortable with you and with each other. An atmosphere of trust and respect among students is imperative to a willingness to examine personal perspectives.

2. Make the influence of personal bias central to the dialogue process. It is absolutely vital that students understand how bias influences all who participate in dialogue groups. The idea must be presented in a powerful way early-on and must be reiterated as students engage in dialogue.

3. Provide visual cues such as posters of helpful questions and comments and handouts with tips and a listing of "pitfalls." These reminders should accompany all practice sessions. Students often report these very specific cues to be the most helpful when beginning to learn dialogue skills.

4. Model dialogue skills throughout the process. The use of fishbowls and interrupted demonstrations are a part of the modeling process. So too is "interrupting" students during practice sessions to interject more helpful language.

5. Use multiple methods of self-analysis that require students to critique their own dialogue skills. Review student-generated information with the class to create recommendations for the next round of dialogue sessions.

6. If possible, keep class sizes small—8 to 10 students are ideal--so that all students can be in one dialogue group. This arrangement allows for consistent monitoring and immediate feedback during dialogue.

The use of critical dialogue has tremendous potential in teacher education. Furthermore, students can learn to use and come to value it in their collaborations with peers. I will let a student, C., say it in her own words:

Tonight my critical incident went really well. Our group stayed away from personal comments and suggestions. We really took to analyzing the situation at hand. The group made me look at the situation from a different angle, possibilities I had not thought of on my own. It was nice to have outside people looking at a fresh situation objectively. This is a technique that I feel I may carry with me for a long time, a great tool for teaching.

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TEACHING CRITICAL DIALOGUE—FURTHER READINGS

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Group Evaluation Checklist

During your group, put a check mark in the middle column across from an item each time you notice it occurs. When finished, write related narrative comments in the third column.

Questions of the "right" kind	Frequency	Narrative comments
- Why did you ask that question? - Explain your thinking. - What are some other alternatives? - What do the rest of you think? - Why do you think that? - What does ____ mean to you? - Can you say that another way? - Others (note other questions used)		
Use of fact-finding questions - Asking fact-finding questions. - Asking about actions rather than thinking behind actions.		
Countering one experience with another - Sharing stories and experiences - Using personal experiences to validate positions (see flaws in thinking)?		
Advice-giving - The group evaluated thinking behind incidents before moving in problem-solving. - The group evaluated advice as well as critical incidents. - Advice changed when examined		
Wait-time - Members asking questions provided wait-time of at least 5 seconds. - Members answering questions took time to think before answering.		
Flaws in thinking - Confusing correlation with cause & effect - Referring to something as if it has accepted truth - Failing to notice assumptions - Not exploring alternatives - Emotion instead of evidence		

Flaws in Thinking

When you are supporting an idea in writing, or arguing a point in a discussion, watch out for the following problems in your critical thinking. To illustrate the various points, I use potential arguments that might be used if someone wanted to show that children's manners today are worse than before, and the offer various related concerns.

- Telling an anecdote—don't use a personal story to prove a point. One case does not mean the argument is true. Example: "Sally comes from a good home and you'd never catch her using language like that."
- Refers to "instinct" or "laws of nature" or "what everyone knows." Example: "Everyone knows manners are important."
- Confusing correlational data with cause and effect: Example: "More mothers are working out of the home, so kids just don't learn manners like they used to."
- Using emotion instead of evidence. Example: "Children's blatantly disrespectful language toward adults points to serious social problems, including increased violence."
- Failing to notice the assumptions in the questions being addressed. Example: Failing to ask if it is important for children to use manners, or if other things might be more important.
- Using" black & white", "right-or wrong" thinking when other alternatives might be important in some cases. Example: "Manners are absolutely necessary. Period."

Based on Halpern, D. (2004), Flaws in thinking. *Monitor on Psychology, 35*(2).