



Literature Discussions as Mangles of Practice: Sociological Theories of Emergence and/in Dialogic Learning Events



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Abstract

In this report, we argue that some of the most productive and edifying kinds of literature discussions among certain ages/grade levels may be best understood as “mangles of practice” (Pickering, 1995). Mangles of practice involve the coalescence of planned and contingent forces, and they produce emergent or self-organizing transformations of ongoing social activities, as well as unpredictable outcomes or products. Indeed, the discussions we studied had these characteristics. They often involved both planned and contingent actions and reactions by individual, social, cultural, and material agents and agencies. As such, they were emergent phenomena about which we could seldom predict what precise collections, collisions, and collusions of actions and reactions would occur within them or what the effects of these collections, collisions, and collusions would be. In spite of (or more likely because of) their unpredictability, these discussions were extremely dynamic knowledge-producing activities. Given this social fact, we think our findings contribute significantly to understanding the lineaments and potentials of dialogic pedagogy, which deepens students’ learning and development. More specifically, when teachers successfully prompt and engage students in more robustly dialogic talk that promotes text-to-life connections, life-to text connections, linkages to non-school knowledge (like that of popular culture), etc., then students often reap a wide variety of benefits with respect to their abilities to engage in genuine inquiry, to reason and argue for particular interpretations, to evaluate complex human actions and decisions, and to develop principled social, cultural, and moral equipment for living their own lives.

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Introduction

The study from which this report was generated was guided by the following research questions: What human and non-human agents are involved in student-led, student-generated discussions about literature? What are the nature and effects of inquiry-based, student-led, student-generated literature discussions? What can teachers learn from these discussions about how they might facilitate classroom talk and social interaction in ways that promote deeper forms of inquiry, more responsive or dialogic forms of classroom talk, and more genuinely co-constructed forms of knowledge about literature and its relation to life?

By student-led, student-generated discourse in inquiry-based language arts activities, we mean to include small group discussion, collaborative work, responsive writing, and all manner of collaborative interpretative activity. By genuinely, co-constructed forms and knowledge, we mean to index ways of imagining self, others, and world that become valuable democratic resources that, as Nussbaum (1995) has explained, cultivate our poetic, metaphoric, and imaginative sensibilities, thus opening up ways of seeing beyond the "facts" and into the minds and hearts of others as they negotiate the exigencies of their lives and engage in forms of social interaction that lead toward increased self awareness, the development of more sophisticated interpretive practices, greater understanding of the lived experiences

of others, and more robust participation in community-based projects, initiatives, or movements (Ganz, 2010; Nikitina, 2009).

To frame the findings from our study, we drew upon Pickering's (1995) "mangles of practice" construct or metaphor. Mangles of practice involve both planned and contingent actions and reactions by individual, social, cultural, and material agents and agencies. As such, they are emergent phenomena about which one can seldom (if ever) predict what precise collections/collisions/collusions of actions and reactions would occur within them or what the effects of these collections/collisions/collusions might be. Indeed, this characterization of activity mapped beautifully onto what we saw when we watched the videotapes of the student-led, student-generated discourse about literature. Besides being useful in characterizing the nature and effects of the activity we studied, the mangles of practice construct is also useful for re-imagining what happens (or could happen) when students engage in discussions about books they read in their English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. In turn, these insights could help ELA teachers imagine and facilitate forms of dialogues about literature that Nystrand (1997) and others have argued should but seldom occur in ELA classrooms.

Importantly, especially for the audience of *Dialogic Pedagogy*, Pickering's mangle practice metaphor can be viewed as a practical operationalization of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Drawing from Bakhtin (1981), we can imagine discourse on a continuum from more recitative to more carnivalesque. More recitative forms are like the traditional Initiation-Response-Evaluation (I-R-E) genre in which an ELA teacher asks a text-based question, a student answers the question, and the teacher ultimately evaluates this answer (e.g., Cazden, 1988). Discourse at this end of the continuum limits possibilities for the co-construction of knowledge, deeper modes of inquiry, and students' ideas about what it means to read and respond to literature. More carnivalesque forms of classroom discourse have much fewer rules or conventions about purposes for reading and responding to literature, the meaning potentials of literary texts, who may initiate discussions, who may ask and answer questions, who may evaluate responses, and how text-based discussions must unfold, etc. Thus, these forms of discourse expand the meaning potentials of literary texts, increase possibilities for inquiry-based teaching and learning, and cultivate the co-construction of knowledge about literature and literary interpretation.

The remainder of the report is organized in the following way: First, we elaborate on our conceptual framework by unpacking key constructs and arguments central to the mangles of practice metaphor and other ways sociologists have theorized emergence, especially ones that have focused on communication practices and activities. Next, because the data analyzed were drawn from a collaborative action research project, we outline the research methods of the study (i.e. the context and participants, the classroom activities involved, the data collected, and our data analysis strategies). We then present key findings derived from analyses of several segments of interaction from our data that illustrate how interactional activity produced text genres, activity genres, and other relevant structures, meanings, and subject positions in contingent but productive ways. Importantly, we contextualize these discourse analyses of interactional segments with relevant contextual information, insisting all along that context itself is a dynamic, social fact that is produced over time just like our focal objects. Finally, we offer some conclusions drawn from this work and suggest some implications for research and pedagogy.

Conceptual Framework

Although theories of emergence or dialogism or improvisation are not very commonly used to frame psychological or educational research, they have been developed and used within sociology and

communication studies for many years to understand and explain phenomena as diverse as micro- and macro- social structure, computer mediated communication, conversation, oral narrative production, laboratory work, and children' pretend play (Giddens, 1984; Latour & Woolgar, 1984; Pickering, 1995; Sawyer, 1997). Although most theories of emergence could be used to frame this work, we found Andrew Pickering's ideas about what he calls "mangles of practice" to be particularly useful because of its focus on moment-to-moment activity and the specifics of social interaction. Mangles of practice involve the coalescence of planned and contingent forces, and they produce emergent or self-organizing transformations of ongoing social activities and the products (including knowledge products) of these activities. This construct was the outcome of Pickering's efforts to explain social practice in real time. Pickering insisted that representational idioms are synchronic and, in the end, fail to explain dynamic, ongoing processes. Unlike representational idioms, performative idioms—ones based on descriptions and explanations of actual social practice in real time—more accurately capture the nature and functions of social activity and have considerably more explanatory power.

To warrant these claims, Pickering offered painstakingly detailed accounts of several "big" events in the history of science, mathematics, and technology. For example, he chronicled Donald Glaser's attempts to build a bubble chamber and eventually a quenched xenon chamber to study the "strange particles" that were noticed in cosmic ray experiments using cloud chambers during the 1950s and bedeviled physicists ever since that time. Pickering also chronicled Giacomo Morpurgo's efforts to find particles (eventually called quarks) that could explain third integral electric charges ($e/3$ or $2e/3$). In these and other examples, Pickering argued quite convincingly that scientific processes and products emerge in the complex, real-time interactions among human, material, and social factors. In his analysis of Glaser's work for example, he showed how the reconfiguration of different material set-ups of bubble chambers affected how strange particles were conceptualized, how experimental goals were developed and achieved or abandoned, how Glaser interacted with his laboratory partners, and even how social life among the larger particle physics community was organized and reorganized over time and as a function of many unforeseen events and forces.

Pickering's theory of emergence pivots on two key ideas: (a) re-imagining agency and (b) taking the temporal flow of activity very seriously. Unlike most theories of agency based in Enlightenment conceptual frameworks, Pickering views agency as much more complex involving human, material, conceptual, and disciplinary agents. Frustrated with the complete absence of time as a constitutive force within the representational idiom, and because emergence is predicated on the flow of time, Pickering places time at the very center of this theory of the mangle of practice. With its resolutely diachronic focus, all forms of agency, all activity, and all products of activity are seen as emerging in time. Examples that support this position abound with respect to theories (e.g., Newtonian physics), the organization of disciplines (e.g., DSM I, II, III, IV, V, VI), the organization of institutions like school (e.g., progressivism, traditionalism, No Child Left Behind), and so on. Time really matters! Within a performative idiom, explanations that appeal to laws or rules are always problematic. We cannot predict social activity or the unfolding of any phenomenon even though we can explain it and its effects quite well after the fact. Everything emerges or becomes continuously in time. The contours of all forms of agency emerge in the temporality of practice; they partially define each other; and they sustain or destroy each other.

Based on these two key ideas and painstaking analyses of several very important research programs in science, mathematics, and technology during the latter half of the 20th century, Pickering theorized the mangle of practice in more or less the following way. Individual or collective actors (scientists, managers, teachers) begin with problems, plans, and goals in a disciplinary context. These

plans and goals are pursued in a field constituted by multiple forms of agency. Pickering calls this a dance of agency. A dialogue of resistance and accommodation ensues where some forms of agency create resistances and human actors accommodate to these resistances. This dance of agency results in a series of interactive stabilizations. The last interactive stabilization is a topographical configuration that defines the state of the art of the field—a particular capture of the various forms of agency involved. The dance of agency and the process of resistance and accommodation, however, could continue and other, different captures could emerge. In other words, this pattern repeats itself endlessly with the precise interactions between resistances and accommodations within it emerging unpredictably.

Although the examples Pickering used to support his argument for the purchase of the mangle of practice as an explanatory framework unfolded over years or decades, we think that the mangle of practice as an explanatory framework is scale variant. It is useful for explaining phenomena that are both much smaller in scale and much larger in scale than those Pickering explained. Literature discussions are smaller in scale. Additionally, we believe that the predominant forms of agency that matter the most in different contexts and in relation to different emergent processes vary considerably. In our study, human agents, textual material, and disciplinary practices mattered most. In this sense, we argue for the importance of re-imagining agency within dialogic discussions to allow for educational frameworks that promote active ownership of the reasoning and evaluation necessary for critical thinking and engaged citizenship.

Therefore, to operationalize the mangle of practice construct for our work here we appealed to theories that have focused on talk and social interaction. According to most of these theories, all ongoing social interactions occur at the intersection of several forces: (a) participants (speakers, performers, interlocutors, etc.) who contribute to an ongoing stream of action and interaction (e.g., Wortham, 1994); (b) the meaning potentials of the texts under construction, and (c) the enablements and constraints of disciplinary resources and practices for text interpretation and knowledge building (e.g., activity genres, text genres, disciplinary conventions, interpretive codes). As Bakhtin (1981) taught us long ago and practiced in his own work, language events such as literature discussions are dynamic processes that do not derive from a particular participant (no matter how powerful), a particular framing device (e.g., a genre), a tradition (e.g., new criticism), or any other structural or contextual constraint. Instead, language events unfold with each new contribution and are thus constantly being produced anew. To maintain the developing coherence of any activity, participants need to be keyed into the unfolding discussion. Of course, what counts as coherence may vary as well, so some contributions that seem to be “off-task” can actually rearticulate the coherence structure of an activity. Similarly, some forces one might expect to have powerful effects may go nowhere.

In more concrete terms, discussions (or social activity) generally that are not heavily constrained by “rules” usually unfold something like this: A participant makes a contribution to ongoing discursive/social activity. It is expected that this contribution will be relatively original in relation to what has occurred before it. Other participants then evaluate the contribution’s relevance to the unfolding discussion. This evaluation is typically immediate and not particularly premeditated. The evaluation process is informed by many factors including but not limited to the content of the contribution, any intertextual connections either stated or implied, whether these connections are understood by other participants, the social status of the contributor, the rhetorical skill of the contributor, etc. The new contribution rearticulates the interpretive process to some degree. Another contribution is then made by another participant, and the process continues. Each participant contributes to the ongoing stream of interaction, and each contribution is partially informed by the prior flow of the stream.

Importantly, participants (or the human agents involved in this process) do so within a rich, historical context comprised of equally rich, sedimented disciplinary traditions (e.g., new criticism, new historicism, reader-response theory) with unique assumptions, norms, discourses and practices that privilege the content and style of some forms of interpretive work over others. In other words, each framework can contribute to the dance of agency within discussions about literature, exerting “real” effects on how literature is approached and understood.

Having and deploying knowledge of genres and sub-genres can exert “real” effects as well. For example, there are many narrative sub-genres. The ones most relevant to this study are the *annal*, the *chronicle*, and the full-blown *narrative* (in this case *historical fiction*). A full-blown *narrative* includes a setting, rich character development, a series of problems to solve, successful or unsuccessful attempts to solve those problems, a climax or high point, and some kind of final resolution. Among other things, people construct and share narratives to make sense of the non-canonical, to develop and maintain social relationships, and to project themselves into possible selves and possible worlds (e.g., Bruner, 1986, 1990; Carroll, 2004; Nussbaum, 1995). A *chronicle* is a bit more complex. It aspires to narrativity, but typically fails to achieve it because it neither infers/explains characters’ goals and motivations nor reaches a highpoint that gets resolve in some sensible way. An *annal* is simply list of events in chronological order. Depending on which of these (or other) sub-genres are invoked, a literature discussion will unfold different meaning potentials and achieve different levels of depth, complexity, and nuance.

If we consider that the dance of agency in literature discussions involves contributions of individuals, cultural tools such as genres, cultural traditions such as new historicism, and other tools and structures that are invoked in the ongoing flow of activity, then heteroglossic social events—from everyday conversations to literature discussions—are perhaps best viewed as interactional spaces in which both individual selves and the social order are continuously and dynamically created or produced. Although historically sedimented, conventional practices act as meta-constraints in this process, they are not determinative for several reasons. First, there are many competing traditions of interpretation. Second, these traditions themselves are dynamic and change over time. Third, the tools of these traditions are appropriated and deployed in unpredictable ways by participants. Finally, as participants interact—deploying the tools of various traditions in various ways—how meaning is constructed and which meanings prevail are open questions.

Central to our way of thinking here is the difference between explanations of talk and social interaction rooted in structuralism versus explanations rooted in sociological theories of emergence. Structural (or formal-theoretical) explanations and processual (or emergence) explanations belong to different orders of reality. Structural explanations purport to discover things that are already there, that have an *a priori* existence such as reducing dreams to Oedipal impulses. Such explanations transform dynamic activity into fixed meanings, thereby eliminating what is most essential to social life when viewed from another perspective—its contingency and its social and collaborative nature (e.g., Pickering, 1995; Sawyer 2001b; Wolf & Hicks, 1989). Sociological theories of emergence offer a starting point for the development of these latter explanations. These theories view knowledge as distributed and largely non-representational involving multiple participants in complex social systems. Knowing is reconceived as the ability to participate productively in shared cultural practices that are constantly producing new knowledge. With respect to literature discussions, constructing the meaning of a literary text would seem to emerge from collaborative improvisations that involve the contingent coalescence of multiple agentic forces—some individual, some collective, some institutional.

Method

The study from which this report was generated used a collaborative action research design in which the first author and a fifth-grade teacher worked together for an entire school year, specifically on student-led literature discussions embedded within a two year study of disciplinary literacies, to explore the nature and effects of small group discussions (including literature discussions) in which students were given increasing responsibility to orchestrate the discussions' content and process.

Collaborative action research is a hybrid approach that integrates strategies from action research and formative experiments. Action research in educational settings (Mills, 2010) is systematic inquiry conducted by teachers or other stakeholders to assess the viability and effectiveness of learning activities or interventions. The ultimate goal of such research is to gain insight into and to develop increasingly reflective practice that leads to improving student outcomes relevant to these activities or interventions, thus offering guidelines for best practice. Formative experiments (Reinking & Bradley, 2007) are designed rather than naturalistic. Researchers introduce innovations; they monitor the nature and effects of these innovations; and they adapt or modify the innovations based on their assessments about effectiveness. Combining strategies from these two approaches to conduct collaborative action research, the teachers and researchers combine their complementary skills and expertise as they work together to create learning experiences for students and to study the effectiveness of these experiences in rigorous, principled, systematic ways.

Context, Participants, and Discourse Framing

To contextualize the analyses we present in the next section, we begin by offering a summary of how literature discussions evolved in the classroom we studied, as well as a brief summary of the book the children were discussing. The teacher we worked with, Ms. G, was known in the district for her teaching excellence and her continual efforts to improve her classroom practice. Many parents requested that their children be in her class even though such requests were not honored due to district policies. Otherwise, there was nothing remarkable about this teacher. The teacher in this study agreed to work with us over a period of two years on various projects to understand the nature and differences of how she facilitated talk and social interaction in three different subject areas: English language arts, science, and social studies. For this article, we focus primarily on the English Language Arts (ELA) portion of the research. However, even though each subject had its own time block each day, content from one subject was often related to content from another. For example, learning related to the piece of historical fiction used in ELA instruction (*My Brother Sam is Dead*) at this point in the year sometimes overlapped with and was connected to learning about the Revolutionary War, which was the focus of the history block.

Literature discussions took place in small, student-facilitated reading groups composed of five or six students. All class members were placed in one of three groups. Students were placed in reading groups early in the year based on various reading assessments. Membership in groups was fluid, however. As the teacher assessed students' abilities and performance within groups across the year, some students were moved "up" and "down" as she saw fit. It is important to note that although the groups were ostensibly ability-groups, because there were only three groups, each group was actually quite heterogeneous with respect to students' comprehension and interpretation abilities.

Although exceptions arose on some days, literature discussion groups met almost daily for about 25 minutes. Each group read approximately six to eight books in a year. At the end of each book, students completed, individually or with peers, projects that related to the books. Students were given a

list of possible options and were able to choose their own projects. For instance, in response to one book, three students completed a board game whose design incorporated many themes of the text. For another book, a student wrote a set of obituaries for its characters. Students always presented their projects to their group members (or the whole class). Guided by rubrics developed by the teacher, students also helped the teacher determine project grades.

Early in the year, the teacher led the discussions, maintaining the responsibility for generating questions that addressed students' comprehension of what they were reading, how they were interpreting the texts, and what their personal responses to the texts were. Following completion of the first book (and based on her assessment of students' readiness) she worked with students to help them learn how to engage in and facilitate rich dialogic interactions around books. At first, she began to make more explicit what she was doing as a model for students to follow. For instance, she sometimes would ask a question and then ask students why she asked such a question. As students began to think and talk about the pedagogical reasoning behind different types of questions, she began to introduce questions she derived from Bloom's taxonomy of higher order thinking. To do so, she introduced one type of question at a time beginning with knowledge-type questions. For each night's readings, students were asked to complete two or three questions of the type focused on (e.g., knowledge, evaluation). Much of the literature discussion that took place the following day focused on the questions students generated. As this continued, the teacher would ask students to compare the various questions, specifically, as well as the types of questions to understand what type of knowledge was needed to generate responses to each. For instance, students began to recognize that analysis-type questions meant that students had to understand the content they had read; that they needed to be able to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information; and that they needed to be able to construct a question whose answer required both textual knowledge and inferential thinking. As students became more comfortable with the process and as their abilities to generate questions and to deconstruct the skills required for answering them, students began to take on more responsibility for generating and engaging with one another's questions and also for interjecting more spontaneous questions and comments as they discussed the texts. For instance, students became critical of questions that could be answered without actually ever reading the text (e.g., Did you like the chapter?).

Once the teacher believed she had adequately modeled questions for group members and that they were thinking in more sophisticated ways about how to generate questions, she began to turn over more responsibility to students for leading literature discussions. Students took successive turns being the "leader" for a day's discussion. The discussion leader within each group was responsible for writing a summary of the assigned chapters and generating a list of questions the group would answer. The teacher made copies of all questions and handed them out to students. On most days, groups were able to get through all of the questions. Sometimes, more than one student was able to respond to a particular question. On some days, however, students became so invested in a particular question or two that the group was unable to get to all of the questions.

Although the readings (and the amount of reading) were assigned by the teacher, leaders were also responsible for assigning additional homework. Often, students assigned predictions of the chapters they were supposed to read. After a while, students began to criticize the assignment and suggest that different assignments were necessary. Some students also took on the role of the discussion leader to mean that they were "the teacher." For instance, one student assigned students to generate discussion questions and cautioned them that the questions must require students to show evidence that they had read the assigned chapters and could not simply require that others share how they felt about what they

had read. Each discussion group would then begin by addressing the previous night's homework before the next leader took over.

Although students took more responsibility for discussions, the teacher continued to participate in discussions in various ways. Sometimes she would do so by attending primarily to discipline or group management. Sometimes she tried to control turn-taking activity. Sometimes she interjected her own questions and responses. The interactions we showcase in this article come from two consecutive days of discussion that occurred at the end of the first year of the study. Although the teacher was present during a portion of the discussions that occurred on these days, students assumed primary responsibility for orchestrating the discussions.

The book that students were reading and discussing was *My Brother Sam is Dead* (Collier & Collier, 1974). This book is a piece of historical fiction, a fact that students did not fully understand until they had completed the book. Set during the Revolutionary War, *My Brother Sam is Dead* introduces readers to a family's struggles as one member, Sam, chooses to fight for the rebels while the rest of the family and the majority of the community they live in, oppose the war. Throughout the book, students learn of how the family copes with this political divide, with hunger, and with death.

Despite the students' expectations, Sam's death comes at the end of the book and is not a result of being killed by the enemy. Sam is shot after he is found guilty of stealing cattle that belonged to his family. In the final chapters of the book, Sam is questioning whether or not the war will be won. The troops have settled in his hometown. Because he knows the community, he is often responsible for taking military officers to various places. During these times, he often takes the opportunity to spend time with his family. In one chapter, he repeatedly warns his brother, Tim, of the need to butcher their cattle because soldiers, including himself when desperate, will steal for their survival. Because the community is known to oppose the rebel's cause, soldiers may not even think twice about such a theft. One evening, while Sam and Tim are talking, they hear noises coming from the barn. They run out to find that Sam's warnings are coming true. Soldiers are stealing the cattle. Sam tells Tim to rustle up the cattle that remain as he chases away the shadowy thieves. A little while later, Tim finds that Sam has been tied up and that the thieves are claiming that he was stealing the cattle. Tim runs to get help, but after several attempts, learns that the fate of his brother is death. The colonel tells him that, whether Sam is actually guilty is not as important as the need for the general to make an example of someone.

Data, Data Preparation, and Data Analysis

The data for this report came from observations of discussions of *My Brother Sam is Dead* conducted by one group of six students. These discussions were audiotaped and field notes were composed. Audiotapes were transcribed using an adapted version of Atkinson and Heritage (1984). Transcription conventions are contained in the Appendix. Field notes were typed and annotated with summary comments, reflections, and preliminary analyses. All relevant student-generated artifacts were photocopied or saved electronically. All of these data were used as context for conducting fine-grained discourse analyses, which we describe below.

These discourse analyses were both theory-driven and thoroughly grounded in data. First, we coded all transcripts for the extent to which segments of discussion varied on a continuum from being more recitative to more dialogic, as well as how these different forms of talk afforded different kinds of participation and different kinds of learning. The dialogicality of the literature discussions refers to a more imaginative activity genre aimed at exploring and constructing a range of other imaginative narratives.

Recitative contributions tend to include facts and interpretations from the story to support one position. In effect, a more open and potentially interpretative literary discussion is desired for the beneficial nature of this kind of learning to occur. Next, informed by our reading of sociological theories of emergence and using strategies adapted from Gee's (2011) form of discourse analysis and Fairclough's (1992) form of critical discourse analysis, we analyzed data to interpret the nature and effects of specific segments of talk and social interaction in the discussions that were located toward the dialogic end of the recitative—dialogic continuum. We focused on these segments because they seemed to represent the phenomenon of “emergence” or “mangles of practice” most fully and explicitly. These analytic strategies allowed us to construct inferences and interpretations about (a) the nature and effects of participants' contributions to the ongoing talk and social interaction, (b) the nature and effects of the statuses of individuals within the discussion and the larger activity systems in which it was embedded, (c) the development of the meaning potentials of the text being discussed, and (d) the enablements and constraints of disciplinary resources and practices for text interpretation and knowledge building (e.g., activity genres, text genres, disciplinary conventions, interpretive codes). Together, these dimensions and their interactions constituted this discussion as a unique and uniquely interesting “mangle of practice.” By analyzing these dimensions of discourse in relation to each other, we were able to interpret how participants produced, reproduced, and transformed their knowledge and social identities within the complex and sometimes contradictory landscape of classroom activity.

Findings

Our findings were constructed by analyzing a lengthy transcript of the two-day discussion of *My Brother Sam is Dead*. Because the transcript is quite long, we have separated the transcript (and our analyses of it) into four segments. Each segment constitutes a sub-event within the overall discussion event. However, because the event was coherent as a whole, we also invite readers to read it (without our analyses) in its entirety. Through our analyses, we try to show the ways in which student-led, student-generated discourse had powerful impacts on students' learning, especially with respect to making text-to-life and life-to-text connections. As such, our findings help us consider and prepare for the unpredictable nature of this type of learning/teaching, while being especially mindful of the ways in which teachers can generate the tremendous potential of new connections and possibilities for student learning made available in the kinds of discursive spaces we call “mangles of practice.” More specifically, our findings offer insights about ways in which teachers might promote more dialogic forms of inquiry within classroom discussions.

Segment 1: Findings

The following discussion segment begins with the teacher nominating a student to read the summary of the chapter he had written for homework. While he is presenting his summary, both the teacher and students ask many questions and interject ideas. In effect, the summary is co-constructed by the group. Parenthetically, at this point in the year, and probably related to the fact that the reading groups were well established, co-constructing knowledge together was a common activity.

1. Ms. G: OK, what was our assignment? Chapter 13. And Edward said his prediction was right.
2. Jen: Pretty much.
3. Tanya: Yeah, cuz he read ahead.
4. Edward: [No I did NOT

5. Ali: [No he did not.
6. Ms. G: [Okay, Edward, you wanna read
your summary
7. Ali: [There are only 2 chapters left//
8. Jen: [One chapter left.
9. ?: [You're accusing him of reading ahead.
10. ?: [She does
11. Ss: [(XXX)
12. Edward: [Awright, what happened was Tim went to (.5) the colonel//
13. Ms. G: [Colonel Parsons?
14. Edward: [Yeah. And he was asleep and so he came back the next day and (.5)
15. Tanya: [Why's he
giving a summary if we have to (X)
16. ?: [Yeah
17. ?: [Yeah, cause that was the assignment.//
18. Jen: [That was the assignment today.
19. Ms. G: [I thought, I thought that, that that's what he was doing.
20. Jen: [*He wasn't reading his summary.*
21. Ms. G: [Oh.
22. Ss: [((Some giggling))
23. Edward: [What happened was (.5) 'Tim went to Colonel Parson's but he was told
to go home because of the nighttime and come back in the morning// ((Noise from
other Ss in classroom increasing.))
24. Ms. G: [((Speaking to S not in group) Umm. (1) Violet (.5)
25. Edward: [And he did, then//
26. Ms. G: [((still talking to students outside of group)) You have a contract now 'cause I
told you to put that away. That has been out all morning and you are supposed to be
doing work. Y, what are you doing Violet?
27. Violet: [(XX) look at it
28. Ms. G: [And you're not supposed to be doing that Violet. OK, sorry Edward.
29. Edward: [And so then he like went back to his house after he was told to go home
and like later in the chapter colonial, uh, Col-on-el Read, I think (1)
30. Ms. G: [((Speaking to someone not in group)) At about 10 till, 10 till 10. (1) OK
31. Edward: [Came and told them that//
32. Ms. G: [Who came?
33. Edward: [Colonial, colonial Read, I think,
34. Ms. G and Ss: [Colonel, colonel.

35. Edward: And, uh, (.5)
[
36. Ms. G: It looks like colonial, but it's colonel
37. Edward: And he said that Sam was going to be trialed, and uh,
[
38. Ms. G: Tried
39. Edward: Yeah, tried, in February, February 6th, and he//
40. Ms. G: For what?
41. Edward: For um, uh, for can, for act, for thief, for, um, stealing
42. Ms. G: Stealing the cattle?
43. Edward: And so then he went to, uh, so the trial ((noise from Ss not in group rises))
so he was found guilty in the trial and he was gonna, uh, be shot, and he went to
the//
44. Ms. G: He didn't have the trial yet.
45. Tanya: Yeah they did.
[
46. Jen: Yeah, he did.
[
47. Ss: Yeah they did
[
48. ?: because they (XX)
[
49. Tanya: He was convicted guilty
[
50. ?: Yeah, Sam was convicted
guilty.
[
51. ?: Yeah
[
52. Edward: Two men were going to get 100 lashes (?); one man was going to be hanged,
and one man was going to be shot.
[
53. Ms. G: I thought that's what they said was going to happen
but they didn't have the trial yet.//
54. Jen: Yeah, they had the trial.
[
55. ?: They had the trial
56. Ss: (XX) ((Lots of discussion about details))
57. Ms. G: OK
58. ?: One man got 50, I thought one of them got 50 lashes
[
59. Ss: (XX) were going to get shot//
60. Ms. G: OK, go, Edward.
61. Edward: And so then they, uh, then they went to Colonel Parsons and//
62. Ms. G: Putnam

63. Edward: No. He went to Colonel Parsons and that's why he//
64. Ms. G: Oh, to see General Putnam.
65. Edward: And then to see if he could see General Putnam, and he gave him a note, and he waited and waited, and finally he was able to go see the general, and he told the general the story, and he, the general let him see Sam, and then Sam, uh, Sam and then Sam and him talked for a while, and then he had to go.

As the discussion group activity begins and students are settling down, they are challenging one another about aspects of the book and their assignment. As was often the case, this discussion began with a request from the teacher to summarize the chapter students had read for homework (Turn 6). Ms. G asks Edward, whose previous day's prediction was correct, to read his summary. Importantly, because the teacher often focused on reading-writing relations, the request to read a summary as opposed to orally summarize the chapter was related to the fact that students' homework assignment for the previous night was to *write* a summary for the chapter. Rather than read his summary, Edward begins to deliver an oral summary of the chapter. The text genre he produces is a *chronicle*, and its attendant meanings are constrained by this genre. Recall that a *chronicle* aspires to narrativity, but it falls short of achieving it because character motivations and goals are not explained or inferred; nor is a high point or a resolution included. Although it is more complex than an *annal* (a simple list of chronological events), a *chronicle* does little more than announce what happened, and it often ends at some arbitrary point.

Beginning in Turn 15, students point out that Edward is delivering an oral summary rather than reading his written summary. Apparently unaware that Edward isn't reading (Turn 19), Ms. G expresses she thought he was doing as she asked. In Turn 20, Jen clarifies that Edward's summary is spoken rather than read. Edward continues, this time apparently reading from his homework assignment. The text he delivers remains a *chronicle*.

Beginning at Turn 24, Ms. G's attention is diverted from the group as she attends to students not in this particular reading group who have become quite noisy. Edward stops reading momentarily and continues again once the teacher's attention returns to the group. However, he is no longer simply reading his text; he is constructing his account of the chapter partially based on the text he wrote and partially from memory. The activity genre, then, has shifted from reading a summary to producing an oral summary based on a written text. This seems to occur partly because he is not confident that what he has written is adequate, and partly because Ms. G repeatedly questions and corrects him. However, for reasons we outline below, the spoken/read summary text and the activity genre it elicits become progressively incongruous with the conversational norms and expectations of "discussing," especially discussing literature, an activity that encourages students to make connections with personal experience, to imaginatively participate in the lives and worlds of characters, to forge intertextual linkages, and to engage in any number of cognitive and affective practices that narrative theorists have argued are uniquely afforded by stories. In this regard, a very interesting tension characterizes the entire remainder of the discussion between the teacher's continual efforts to have students enact an *annal* or *chronicle* genre based on their summaries (a "just the facts, ma'am" orientation) and the students' efforts to explore the much richer affordances of the *narrative* genre.

Indeed, students try to co-opt or revise the genre-based expectations of the *annal* or *chronicle* quite often and in ways that offer them opportunities for conjecture about the ambiguity of meaning, and to imagine what it might feel like for Tim (Sam's brother) and others to experience the prospect that Sam

may be facing death. For example, their efforts to discuss whether Sam is guilty and whether there has been (or would be) a trial index their interest in the emotional lives of the characters and seriousness of situations about which they read. In doing so, they threaten to breach the teacher-anticipated *chronicle* discussion. They get some traction in this regard by the interruptions from another group to which the teacher has to attend. They can follow their own interpretive inclinations for a short time but are soon brought back to a plot-dominated focus by the teacher. They also create some traction for themselves by continually coming back to inferences about Sam's fate that the guilty verdict implies. It is plausible that the teacher's attempt to perpetuate a *chronicle* genre is breached because students recognize and respond emotionally to complexities of circumstance, motivation, and fate embodied in the novel, especially in relation to the meaning of Tim's (Sam's brother) conversation with General Putnam and his subsequent visit to Sam.

Still, the text genre remains a *chronicle* although these breaches continue to disrupt and transform its unfolding. Students' corrections regarding the timing of the trial and their statements in line 52, with allusions to "death" and "hanging" and "50 lashes" are examples of this press toward narrative understanding. This is relevant because the *chronicle* text genre still exerts some waning power as a conversational constraint at this point in the literature discussion. It is clearly not capable of affording students the kind of space for discussion and engagement that they want (and need) with respect to the prospect of Sam's death. Paradoxically, all of the teacher's questions and corrections, and especially those offered by students (Turns 44-60), can be viewed as awkward attempts to exploit the affordances of the *narrative* genre within a literacy event that has come to be defined more by the affordances of a *chronicle* with its focus on literal facts and the precise recounting of events. As the transcript reveals, students continually and in various ways express their desire to ask questions and offer commentary that is more speculative or inferential. Every once in a while, the teacher plays into this apparent desire, but more often she enforces a more plot-based reading of the text. Particularly important here is the fact that Ms. G challenges whether Edward has rendered events in the correct, temporal sequence (Turn 44). Apparently remembering the chronology as Edward had, many students argue against the teacher's recollection of events, a conversational move that also functions to prefigure their attempts to enact a genre that would allow them to explore affective, motivational, and situational aspects of the text more fully. For a short time, the discussion shifts from a combination of two recitative activity genres (Initiation-Response-Evaluation and summary reading) to a dialogue in which students explore the emotional worlds that Sam and Tim inhabit at this point in the story. Although Ms. G does not explicitly acknowledge that the students are right, she does so implicitly, in Turn 60 when she says, "OK, go Edward" which reinstates the activity genre of reading a summary. As she had done before the emergence of the debate about the story's precise chronology, she continues to focus on the literal facts of the story (Turns 62 and 64) thus drawing their attention away from the internal lives of the characters, which from a narrative theory perspective, is much more interesting and important. Drawing attention to this segment of dialogue provides an example of how educators can learn to identify these dialogue shifts as important strategies for learning and teaching. If we can recognize the meaning of these shifts, we can then employ this type of learning successfully within the classroom.

We would like to reiterate here that the focus of the debate was about precisely when the trial occurred and that this focus instantiated the *chronicle* as a powerful genre constraint. Although this constraint continues to exert its influence, it does so in the shadow of the breach and subsequent student improvisational contributions, because it failed to afford the invitation to participate in Tim's state of mind, especially the reason he so needed to meet with General Putnam. The chronological corrections are urgent and numerous, signaling students' attempts to "feel" for Tim and his

brother Sam. And this, writes Weinstein (2002), is reflective of the affective domain that literature and art so readily invite us to occupy, as it is “always telling us about human feeling, about what is deepest and most enduring in our lives” (p. xx). Therefore, the enforcement of the *chronicle* genre constrains the discussion, but it is also opens up discursive possibilities because it creates solidarity among the students that leads them to introduce new and more complex text and activity genres. The importance of this fact will become more apparent in our analysis of the next segment of the literature discussion where the enablements and constraints of different text and activity genres exert powerful effects.

Segment 2: Findings

In the next segment of the discussion, which followed directly on the heels of the last segment, Ms. G asks a relatively simple but very important question (Turn 66), which functions as an invitation for students to engage with the story they are reading at much higher levels of abstraction and inference. As the transcript reveals, it is difficult to know if the teacher’s invitation comes in response to recognizing students’ expressed interests in discussing Sam’s future or from a pre-planned instructional decision. However, as we will show in our analysis, this question and the ways in which it is taken up by students has important consequences for the text and activity genres enacted by the group. Quite possibly—and probably tacitly—the flow of the discussion toward more motivational, affective, and situational dimensions of the story was nobody’s decision but an effect of the “mangle of practice” constituted by the contingent contributions to the discussion itself, an unintentional but powerful form of collective agency.

66. Ms. G: How was he acting?
67. Ali: Like he was going to die (In playful voice)
68. Ss: (XX)
69. Ms. G: (X) Was he acting, really, that sad for a person who is going to be killed?
70. Tanya: No, I don’t think so.
71. ?: (X) seemed happy
 [
72. Jen: Like, I’m OK for a person whose just going to be shot.
73. Katharine: I think that’s what he, I think he really kinda wanted to be killed during
 the war.
74. Ali: They made a typo.
75. Ms. G: Why? ((to Katharine))
 ((lots of noise coming from people from outside of group))
76. Katharine: so, he could like, well I don’t know, cause it kind of like, cause he
 wouldn’t, um, like, he was going to sign up again in the war and everybody was
 telling him that he was going to die and stuff like that so it kind of seems like he
 really wants to die.
77. ?: (XX)
 [
78. ?: Like Lieutenant (XX)
79. Ms. G: Why, why does he have to die?
80. ?: Cause of what he believes in.
81. ?: Cause no one believes him.
82. Ms. G: Do you think that? You think that no one believes him?
83. ?: I think that//
 [

84. ?: I think he//
[
85. AJ?: I think that he just doesn't want to go home. Otherwise he'd be, 'cause if he goes home now, he'll just be yelled at.
[
86. Edward: E.T. go home.
[
87. Ss: (XX) ((Also lots of noise from other groups in the room))
[
88. Ms. G: How many people said that ((to reading group))//OK, Violet, get in your seat, get in your seat. Your work is not, people that do not have work done are not allowed to get up. Mike, I do not want to see you up. Graham. Violet. ((addressing students not in reading group))
89. Edward: (Voice over while Ms. G reprimanding Ss.) E.T. go:: ho::me. . . E.T. go:: ho::me. . . Sam don't go:: ho::me. . . Sam don't go:: ho::me. . .
90. ?: He said E.T. go home and then Sam don't go:: ho::me. ((to Ms. G who has, apparently, returned her attention to the group))

When Edward finishes his summary (Turn 65), Ms. G asks the group how Sam was acting (Turn 66). Based on the content of the book, Ms. G seems to have a specific goal in mind here, namely, to explore why it might be that Sam does not seem distraught about the possibility of capital punishment. Importantly, according to narrative theory (e.g., Bruner, 1986; MacIntyre, 1981) a creative text such as *My Brother Sam is Dead* is well suited to explorations of the inner lives and moral sensibilities of characters. As this phase of the discussion unfolds, Ms. G participates with the students in moving the discussion to a more inferential level and to explore Sam's emotional world. However, her question is so vague that it could elicit any number of responses from more literal to more speculative, which might elicit the enactment of text and activity genres that pull for a range of readings, some more plot-based and others more intensely psychological and sociological. Interestingly, and continuing the earlier inclination to move beyond Ms. G's emphasis on summarizing, several students comment on Sam's possible state of mind.

Beginning in Turn 73, Katharine, offers an explanatory or dispositional account of Sam's demeanor by inviting others to explore his thoughts, feeling, and probable motivations. More specifically, she suggests that he might have wanted to die a martyr and is resolved to his fate. Her contribution shifts the discussion's focus away from literal facts, precise chronologies, and factors external to Sam's life-world and toward more speculative, inferential, and qualitative dimensions of characters and text such as the emotions, motivations, and the complex inner life of a main character. In other words, her questions invite a paradigm shift of sorts as it pertains to the nature and quality of a literary discussion. In so doing she moves the group out of the activity genre of summarizing and into the activity genre focused on the life-informing dimensions of literary interpretation, a trajectory that, if you recall, was perhaps initiated by Ms. G's question in Turn 66: "How was he acting?" Concomitantly, the genre of the text the group is co-constructing begins to change from *chronicle* to full-blown *narrative*. In this regard, Ms. G's question encourages the students to co-create a *narrative* designed to examine and understand Sam's inner life as emotionally complex, even turbulent. By exploring the inner worlds of Sam and other characters, the students gain a better understanding of the richness, complexity, and even contradictory nature of human experience generally (e.g., Nussbaum, 1995; Weinstein, 2003).

Rather than following Katharine's more personal line of questioning aimed at exploring Sam's complex inner life, Ms. G once again makes a contribution that shifts the discussion back to reasoning about factual aspects of the novel by asking, "Why, *why* does he have to die?" (Turn 79). However, continuing Katharine's personally and morally investigative approach to reading Sam's life, another student directs the question back toward inner life by saying that Sam has to die because of what he believes (Turn 80). Ms. G elects not to pursue the question about Sam's beliefs. Another student returns the discussion to an exploration of external factors as a way to respond to Ms. G's question about "why" Sam has to die by suggesting that he has to die because no one believes that he is innocent. Ms. G continues to pull for an explanation involving social structures and forces that are determining why Sam has to die by asking, "Do you think that? You think that no one believes him?" (Turn 82). Understanding such forces is privileged over understanding and imaginatively participating in the inner lives of Sam and the other characters in the story (i.e., like the kind of reading Katherine encouraged). Importantly, based on the content of the novel, both readings are quite possible. In this regard, at several points in this chapter, other characters suggest that Sam must die, whether he is guilty or not, because General Putnam needs to maintain his authority and one way of doing that is to enforce a zero tolerance policy. For instance, Colonel Read offered the following rationale to Sam's brother, Tim:

Do you want to know what General Putnam is thinking? It's this. He's thinking that he can't win the war if he doesn't keep the people on his side. He's thinking that he can't keep the people on his side if the troops are running amok among the civilian population. . . . He is determined to scare the wits out of the troops to keep them in line. And he's thinking that it doesn't matter very much who he executes to do it. . . . [O]ne man's agony is like another's; one woman's tears are no wetter than anybody else's. And that's why he's going to have Sam shot. (p. 194)

By asking "You think no one believes him?" (Turn 82), Ms. G betrays that she was committed to answering the question of Sam's guilt or innocence based on empirical evidence from the text. Additionally, she betrays here her initial commitment to helping students explore his inner life that she initiated with the question, in Turn 66: "How was he acting?" This is important with respect to the potentials of the interpretive process because it maintains a tension between two competing genres: *chronicle*, which foregrounds external factors and factual evidence and *narrative*, which foregrounds people's inner lives and personal struggles.

Although Ms. G encourages the exploitation of both potentials, she more often encourages the former. In contrast, the students more often encourage the latter. The tension between competing orientations creates a unique "mangle of practice" within which the students explore the idea that there is some kind of moral relevance to understanding Sam's life by analyzing his various actions in relation to their concrete, cultural-social-historical contexts. Indeed, all "real-life" understanding requires thinking about the lives of people in this way. Art and its interpretation both recapitulate and compose life here. In relation to this point, the genres enacted are not just literary genres but specific kinds of literate work—work that dissolves boundaries between text and life. To us, this kind of literate work is very powerful and embodies everything that many humanities scholars have said about the life-enhancing power of narratives (MacIntyre, 1981; Weinstein, 2003).

At the end of this segment, Edward offers a contribution that further signals the weakening of the prevailing embodiment of summary/*chronicle* endorsed by Ms. G. Inspired by AJ's suggestion that Sam didn't want to go home, he begins to chant, "E.T. go home" (Turn 89) which later becomes "Sam don't go home" (Turn 90). Importantly, Edward's chanting has the potential to take the discussion in a different

interpretive direction, yet it is not taken up by anyone in the group as a serious contribution to the discussion. This is somewhat surprising because it constitutes a gentle assault on the activity genre privileged by Ms. G, a move that students both initiated and extended throughout the discussion.

Segment 3: Findings

The tension that emerges in this next section produces talk and social interaction that are more dialogic and inferential. This dialogicality continues, and even increases at times, for the remainder of the discussion (Segments 2 and 3; Turns 86-198). More people talk over each other. More people ask questions. The discussion's flow is less controlled by the teacher alone. Discussions parallel to the main discussion erupt (e.g., Turn 86). And the general energy level of the discussion escalates. In listening to the audiotape of the discussion, it is often difficult to determine who is saying what and who is responding to whom. Contributions of all sorts, including disruptions to interpretive preferences only contribute to the production of meaning-making activity when they are ratified and developed by other participants, and their ratification of contributions inspires or at least invites the possibility of further "mangles" – contingent, generative blendings of text and activity genres. By virtue of its mild ridicule of the teacher's authority and perhaps her discussion preferences, these disruptions serve as reminders of the possibility that other, more dialogic participation structures might be enacted as the discussion unfolds.

91. Ms. G: How many people said Sam did it?
92. Katharine: Oh, the more I thought about it, the more//
93. Ms. G: Sam was the only person that said (X) did it, so it's two against one.//
94. ?: I know but//
95. Ms. G: Even though it doesn't make sense, stealing your own stuff.
96. ?: ((giggle))
97. ?: Yeah, I know
98. Katharine: Yeah, but actually, once they, once, at first I was like why would he steal his own cows? It didn't fit. But then once when Tim was talking to General Putnam it kind of sounded like, maybe, like he did, like maybe they needed the meat so he said he (X) he lived there so that he could tell those people. But then it kind of backfired on him because then he was gonna get shot or something like that. But I don't know//
99. Ss: (XX)
100. Ms. G: How many of you think, how many of you think Sam really did steal it?
101. ?: Why would he steal the cow?
[
102. ?: No he couldn't have because he was with Tim.
103. Ali: Yeah, but like they said in the chapter he could have organized it with the other twoguys.
[
104. Ss: Yeah
[
105. Ali: and then they beat him up and then he'd be shot because that way he'd be famous and be a Revolutionary War hero.
[
106. ?: No because//
107. Timothy?: (X) because almost the whole last chapter he was saying "you better

- butcher the cows, Tim, you better butcher the cows." That's what he said the whole time
- [
108. Ali: Yeah so he could steal the meat.
109. ?: How could he have stole them? (1) {St} Whatever.
110. Ms. G: Stolen them.
111. ?: He didn't steal them, he organized (X)
- [
112. ?: He was there
113. Jen: No, but he, but he told people that, you know, I live there so like steal the cows from//
114. Ali: Why did he, why did he
- [
115. Ss: (XX)
116. Ali: Why did he stop, why did he stop, leave his post? He probably left his post so he could keep Tim and his brother busy//
117. Tanya? Katharine?: But he would not steal (X)
118. Ali: How do you kno:::w?
119. Jen: He could've 'cause his mother, his family was (X) Tories.
- [
120. Ms. G: OK, now Tanya raised her hand, Tanya raised her hand.
121. Tanya: (XX)
- [
122. Jen: He was a rebel.
123. Ms. G: I can't hear you Tanya
124. Tanya: Sam kept saying to Tim that somebody was probably going to kill (X) cows (XX)
125. Ms. G: So what, what is your point then? That//
126. Tanya: That Sam could have
- [
127. Ss: (XX)
128. Jen: The Meeker family is//
129. Ms. G: Oka::y. Timothy? What do you think?
130. Timothy: I think he probably, he probably could've because um//
131. Ms. G: Could've what?
132. Timothy: Well um, conspired with the two men to kill the cows
133. Ms. G: Cause why?
134. Timothy: Otherwise he might've *wanted* to get caught, cause he, I don't think that Tim and Susannah would let him go out of Redding with the troops.
135. Ms. G: You don't think so? How could they have stopped him?
136. Timothy: Well they could have killed him.
137. Ms. G: You think his own mom would've killed him?
138. Timothy: Good point. But, they could have tied him
- [
139. ?: (XX) siege
- [
140. Timothy: tied him somewhere down so um,

- but they won't miss one man from the army.//
141. Jen: They cou::ld.
142. Ms. G: OK, Katharine.
143. Katharine: Well, what I think happened is what I think maybe Sam did tell other people to go steal them, but then he didn't think they were going to tell (laughing). He didn't think people were going to tell or anything like that and that he wouldn't be shot or anything but his plan kind of backfired on him because then he um
- [
144. Jen: Well that wasn't so (XX)
145. Katharine: Don't know why the plan backfired on him.
146. Ms. G: Because he's going to end up getting killed, isn't he?
147. Ss: Yeah, he was.
148. Katharine: Well, yeah, that's how, that's how it ended up backfiring on him because they told, and he told them that . . .
149. Ms. G: If they all agreed to keep it secret, then the plan//
- [
150. ?: (XXX)
151. Ms. G: Excuse me, I'm talking. Then the plan would not have backfired, would it? (1) if they all agreed, but obviously, either they turned on him or he caught (X). Ali?
152. Ali: I have two things to say. One thing is I think it's a conspiracy:
153. ?: (X) (Ss laughing)
154. Ms. G: OK, tell us why.
155. Ali: Ali: Second of all, why? Oh, I think it's a conspiracy. Why? I'm not sure, but I like to say that. Second of all, the thing is, OK, it was really funny. I was watching a movie, and it was really funny, um. It wasn't really around the Revolutionary War, but uh, the USS Enterprise, the original one, went back into time and then they call him Colonel Kirk, Colonel Kirk and the guy says, uh, it's ((Ali pronounces Colonel as Ka-lo-nel). (X) It's colonel, he, he, he, he.
156. Ms. G: OK. Edward?
157. Edward: (laughing at first) All right. Um, You know when they were, when Tim was visiting Sam, Sam said that he was running. He had the shovel, and when the men were, one man, one man, one man was standing there like this just looking around, and he came up and like hit him.//
158. Ms. G: Hit who?
159. Edward: Hit the man who was just standing there like guarding it, and the man that he didn't see was like cutting the cows open, and then he was like, um, one man was on the ground and the guy who was on the ground probably said that Sam said that. Then he came up and like grabbed him, and they started punching him and stuff, and they tied his back to make it look like
- [
160. Jen: tied his hands behind his back
161. Ms. G: So your point is? ((to Edward))
162. Edward: Sam didn't do it.
163. Ms. G: Sam didn't do it.
164. Edward: (X) when it hits him.
165. Ms. G: Did you want to say something, Grace?

166. Grace: No.
167. Ms. G: AJ?
168. AJ: If Sam, if Sam planned it out, then why did they capture the other three, um, then why did they capture the other four cows, and they only cut up one. And they didn't even take that meat.
169. ?: They didn't have time to.
170. Jen: [They didn't have time to 'cause it takes a long time to herd a cow//
171. Ms. G: But he's got a good point...
172. ?: [yeah
173. Mrs. G. [... If Sam planned it out, would they have waited 'til they got the meat before they took him in?
174. Ss: Yeah. They didn't even get any meat.
175. Ms. G: They didn't get any meat out of it, and they're getting Sam killed, so if they would've planned it, then they could've set up
176. ?: [the cows mooing
177. Ms. G: [set up Sam but they already would've gotten their meat and they could've actually cooked it.
178. ?: [Ms. G, Ms. G
179. Ms. G: Could they have kept it, could they have kept it?
180. ?: [The cows would've started mooing.
181. Ms. G: [Excuse me, could they have kept it, um, like in a sort of
182. ?: [Yeah
183. Ms. G: [hostage sort of like they could've.
184. Jen: They did that with the, the little, oh, never mind.
185. ?: Jerry
186. Ms. G: Jerry
187. Jen: Oh yeah, Jerry.
188. AJ: So that's kind of proof that he didn't do it
189. Ms. G: OK, Katharine?
190. Katharine: OK, I am so good. OK, what I think
191. Ms. G: [You are?

192. Katharine: happened now is because you made a good point and that they showed like (XX), and I think I know now why the reason it kind of backfired on them. Because Sam probably wasn't supposed to go chase after him until they had a chance to get the meat, but he went too soon. And then so they went, they probably thought that we didn't have any meat so they went and told on Sam.
193. ?: That's so (X). . .
194. Ms. G: OK, so how many people think that Tam, that Sam is guilty? That he was a part of it? (1)
((No audio response))
195. Ms. G: How many of you think that Sam is not guilty.
196. Ss: Ooh, oh.
197. Jen: Cause Sam was like//
198. Ms. G: OK, Katharine why don't you read your summary.

Recall that in Segment 2, Ms. G had initiated a conversation with students centered around how many of them thought Sam had stolen the cows. However, she was distracted by students outside of the reading group and stopped to discipline them. When she returned to the discussion, she finished asking her question, "How many people said Sam did it?" Importantly, how the students took up her question redirected the discussion to focus on more literal dimensions of the text. Even more importantly, it also led to the abandonment of discussion about the very important and more morally focused question she had asked just seconds earlier about why Sam had to die? (Turn 79).

In the beginning of Segment 3, Ms. G asks the students, "How many people said Sam did it?" This question, however, is ambiguous. Is she asking about what the students think or what the characters in the novel thought? The question is taken up by Katharine, who abandons her inquiry into Sam's internal struggle and motivation, suggesting that she thinks the teacher wants to know how many people in the reading group think Sam was guilty. The teacher clarifies that she had asked about how many characters in the novel thought Sam was guilty (Turn 93). Ms. G follows up her clarification suggesting that it may be illogical to steal one's own possessions (Turn 95). Whether she intends to or not, this comment provides an invitation for students to return to more speculative/inferential activity, and they subsequently draw upon activity genres that tend to support inquiry into the characters' motivations and state of mind. The remaining discussion is a combination of overlapping activity genres that range from providing evidence for beliefs (a genre that Ms. G endorses) to more discursively risky poetic/imaginative genres that require discussion designed to support further conjecture about Sam's cognitive and emotional states. Katharine takes up this invitation by offering an interpretation in which it might make sense that Sam was involved in the cow theft. Parenthetically, the transcript suggests that Katharine had actually tried to begin to offer this interpretation several turns earlier (Turn 92), but was cut off when the teacher answered her own question (Turn 93). Because Katharine had suggested earlier that Sam might have wanted to "die a martyr" but is now suggesting that he might have been guilty, we wonder whether the teacher's persistent text-verifiable/dependent questions about Sam's innocence or guilt has begun to persuade some students to think along those less existential lines, even students like Katharine, who have been actively engaged with the text at multiple interpretative and imaginative levels throughout.

However, further revealing the unstable, dynamic, and mangled nature of the conversation, the teacher's almost random comment about the illogicality of stealing one's own possessions and

Katharine's response to this comment escalate the dialogicality of the literature discussion. This interchange leads to a return to a more free-wheeling, poetic/imaginative activity genre aimed at exploring and constructing a range of other imaginative narratives in response to Sam's life, his reasoning, motives, and evaluating the possibility of his guilt or innocence. Many students contribute facts and interpretations from the story to support one position or another with respect to whether Sam had been involved in stealing the cows. In effect, a more open and potentially interpretative literary discussion has emerged. This discussion is shut down, however, when the teacher, for whatever reasons, notes that Tanya has her hand raised, implicitly signaling that it is Tanya's turn to talk. The effect of this indirect speech act is to change the rules for discussion participation. Now, instead of speaking when one has something to say, one is expected to raise one's hand and speak only when called on. The activity genre quickly shifts from a literary discussion characterized by interpretative and creative explorations into the life, thoughts, motivations, and complex circumstances of a character to an I-R-E more focused on historical facts. Interestingly, however, and even though they are not officially nominated by the teacher, Jen and Timothy continue to play by the rules of open discussion, interjecting ideas and interpretations relevant to the topic at hand (e.g., Turns 122, 128, 140). However, Jen is edged out by comments such as "I can't hear you, Tanya" uttered by the teacher (Turn 123), another indirect speech act designed for disciplining students not nominated to talk.

Importantly, more dialogic participation structures continue to exert strong effects on how Ms. G actually implements the IRE. In this regard, Gordon Wells (1993) demonstrated that I-R-E is actually an overgeneralization that is used to talk about many different participation structures that are tightly or loosely managed by teachers, often with quite different outcomes both in terms of students' opportunities for participation and for collective meaning making. In the case at hand, instead of defaulting to known-answer questions, Ms. G poses more open-ended questions that support students' efforts to offer interpretive claims and to search for evidence and warrants to support them, especially with respect to inquiry into Sam's life and times. Thus students' contributions continue to rely largely upon more creative and poetic activity genres marked by speculative and inferential dimensions of the text rather than literal dimensions. In other words, the transcripts show evidence of students' commitment to co-construct an ethical, yet compassionate and imaginative *narrative* about Sam even though the shift to I-R-E might have led them back to a *chronicle* or other summary-like genre and a focus on verifiable facts. As they seek to understand Sam's involvement in killing the cows, they engage in deliberations that are a mix of reasoned analysis and emotional travail. Indeed, one of the key affordances of literature is to invite/engage readers in moral deliberations and to judge others only after knowing the particulars of their richly contextualized lives (Nussbaum, 1995). That students are engaged in moral deliberations and character evaluations are evidenced in the wide range of text and activity genres they invoke—from more argumentative ones to more narrative ones to more poetic ones.

Eventually, even Ms. G is drawn into contributing speculative ideas to the ongoing efforts to co-construct the meaning of the text around the prospect of Sam's criminal involvement (beginning at Turn 147). This social fact is brought into high relief in Turn 151 when she utters, "Excuse me, I'm talking" and again in Turn 181, when she utters, "Excuse me, could they have kept [the meat] . . ." Ms. G's eagerness to be a full participant in the discussion and not just a facilitator, as well as the speculative nature of her contributions, seem at least partially an effect of students' continual returns to dialogue, inference, moral deliberation, etc. Her comments also speak to the authenticity of the imaginative and perhaps ethical work in which students are engaged. Katharine's contributions are especially critical here, but so are the ways in which they are ratified and elaborated by other students.

After a series of student and teacher turns, Ali offers an original contribution that disrupts the direction and pace of the discussion (Turn 152). First, he suggests that Sam's arrest may have been part of a conspiracy. When Ms. G asks him to support his position, Ali makes it clear that he did not offer his conspiracy theory because he really believed it but because he liked to say the word "conspiracy." He then adds a second contribution related to a *Star Trek* episode he has seen (Turn 155), which, while entertaining, does not contribute in any substantive ways to the group's efforts to understand important meanings associated with the story. Interestingly, neither the students nor the teacher follows up on what he says. In fact, the teacher dismisses his comments by immediately calling on Edward. Recall that the power of participants' contributions to produce collective activity is largely dependent on whether and how they are taken up by the participants involved. Such contributions do not always lead to changes in text interpretations or activity genres.

In Turn 157, and in continuing the analysis of Sam's choices and moral demeanor, Edward attempts to argue for Sam's innocence by drawing upon evidence from the text. To accomplish this, he draws upon a mix of *narrative/imaginative* genres and evidenced-based analysis much like Thurgood Marshall did in his rhetorically powerful and legally effective closing statement in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* trial. However, Edward is not particularly effective at making explicit links between his interpretive goal and the events he is describing. Ms. G doesn't seem to understand where he is going with these comments and asks him what his point is. Edward's response, "Sam didn't do it" indexes the fact that he has been offering evidence for Sam's innocence. Whereas up until now (Turn 163), Ms. G supported the idea that Sam was guilty, her acceptance of Edward's claim suggests that she is now more willing to entertain evidence-based claims of Sam's innocence. AJ continues the line of argument that Edward began, offering more evidence from the text that supports Sam's innocence and the subsequent line of moral inquiry they pursue (Turn 168). More specifically, he argues that if Sam was involved in stealing the cows, he and his partners would have harvested the meat for themselves. Importantly, AJ suggests that if Sam had been involved in the theft, not allowing his partners sufficient time to steal and butcher the cattle before turning on them, would have been illogical. Two students suggest a logical explanation for why they did not harvest the meat. What remains unclear, however, is whether the students offer these explanations to support AJ's reasoning or to challenge it. The teacher seems to think that they are challenging AJ, and she argues for the cogency of his interpretation.

A series of turns ensue that produce a hybrid activity genre constituted as a struggle between the students' efforts to enact a compassionate yet critical dialogic debate about Sam's guilt or innocence and the teacher's efforts to enforce an I-R-E frame. Effectively controlling the floor, the teacher elaborates AJ's position. In contrast, several students offer evidence that cast doubt upon this position. For example, they mention the issue of mooing cows. However, Ms. G surrenders neither the floor nor the I-R-E frame so that the students can further develop their argument. We suspect that they want to argue that the noise of the mooing cows forced Sam, who was talking with Tim, his presumed alibi, to chase after his partners sooner than they had initially planned. This constitutes a logical explanation to what AJ and Ms. G have been claiming is illogical. AJ implies that there is no need to continue the debate when he says, "So, that's kind of proof that he didn't do it" (Turn 188). The teacher then calls on Katharine who begins by acknowledging that the teacher (or AJ) made a good point (Turn 192). However, Katharine then challenges AJ's assumption that the debate is over when she refers back to the counter arguments that many students have been trying to interject while the teacher has been controlling the floor. She also re-introduces some claims that she had begun to develop and work through much earlier in the discussion (i.e., in Turns 98, 143). More specifically, she re-introduces the idea that Sam and his

partners' plan backfired. Each time she returns to this idea, she presents it with more complexity, nuance, and explanatory power.

Apparently wanting to put closure on the debate about Sam's guilt or innocence, Ms. G calls for a vote. Because we do not have video data for this particular discussion and because students cast their votes by raising their hands, we do not know the final count. The results of the vote, however, do not seem to matter much to the teacher. She cuts off one student who attempts to explain her vote, and she immediately reinstates the activity genre that had begun this literature discussion by asking another student (Katharine) to read her summary of the chapter completed for homework. In a way, this conversational move by the teacher both acknowledges the authority of her own perspectives regarding Sam, and it works to sanction and authorize ways of "reading" and discussing the novel that continue to prioritize the value of sticking to the available facts. In other words, this final turn by Ms. G suggests that things must end as they began. Such a move has a way of remaking the previous interpretative discussion as something that is valued, but left us wondering about the possibility that, within a particular instructional framework, such a discussion might also be thought of as little more than an academic "interlude." Looking back over how the discussion unfolds, we wonder about the nature and possible effects of literary discussions, especially how their affordances might be exploited to help students experience, value, and legitimize the epistemological and ethical benefits that so many humanities scholars have discovered and written about (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1997; 2006; Bruner, 1986; Carroll, 2004; Edmundson, 2004; Spellmeyer, 2003; Weinstein, 2003). We also wonder why Ms. G did not allow the debate to continue, especially since there were only a few minutes left for this activity, and because the group had already heard Edward's summary.

Segment 4: Findings

A few minutes later, at the very end of this day's discussion of *My Brother Sam is Dead*, Ms. G signals closure of the discussion by segueing into the students' homework assignment for the evening. Throughout this strip of activity it is important to note how the shifting terrain of text (summary) and multiple activity genres creates (and thus describes) book discussions as co-constructed processes of overlapping struggles and tensions between the students and the teacher. In other words, as "mangles of practice."

272. Ms. G: OK, for your assignment to write//
273. Jen: Oh, but you said two predictions. I want to make a prediction
274. Ms. G: We don't have time because Ali made a long prediction. We are going to write
a different ending
[
275. Ss: Yes!!
[
276. Ms. G: either from the author's point of view, which would mean you'd say
"and then Tim said 'Sam fell to the ground.'"
277. Ss: (XX)
[
278. Katharine: No, it'd be more detailed,
[
279. ?: I thought
[

280. Katharine: See, I'm doing it in this writing.
281. Ms. G: OK, Katharine, as long as you can read it. Now listen, or you can write it in summary form. The ending should be longer than a couple of sentences.
282. Ss: (XX)

End of Lesson

Importantly, Ms. G's instructions about the homework assignment are both sparse and ambiguous, perhaps because students interjected examples and comments, and perhaps because she had to rush through them quickly because language arts time was over. We have no evidence in any of the data that she made any attempts to expand on these instructions or to mitigate the ambiguity in her message. However, based on her actual utterances (Turns 274, 276, and, 281), the endings produced by students, and Ms. G's questions about and comments on these endings, she seems to be asking students to rewrite the endings of the story either in third-person or first-person narration. Given the rich potentials for exploring the epistemological affordances of engaging with literary works that prioritize human feeling as a way of knowing and cultivate the imagination necessary for empathetic understanding and democratic life, we wonder why Ms. G chose to direct students' attention to different forms of narration. Such ways of reading and discussing might have offered possibilities for understanding the complex exigencies of characters' lives, examining the affective and at times visceral underlife of the "people" encountered in creative narratives, thinking about the significance of narrative events, and reflecting on characters' moral dilemmas and choices. We also wonder what kind of "mangle" might have emerged had she directed them to pursue other issues or tropes.

Finally, looking back at all of the discussion snippets we have unpacked here, it is really interesting to contrast their improvisational and contingent qualities with the dominant models and practices of literature discussions in the extant research literature (e.g., Appleman, 2000; Daniels, 2002; Gillespie, 2010; Mellor & Patterson, 2011; Soter et al., 2008) that often argue exclusively for more theoretically staged ways of reading or discursively prescribed instructional approaches. Most of these models and practices are far more authority driven and define what counts as legitimate transactions with literature in much narrower ways than what we have seen here. What if more literature discussions in more ELA and English classrooms offered students more freedom to pursue interpretive pathways they found compelling? What if their teachers were more interested in and equipped to help them mine the affordances of reading and examining literary texts in ways that were framed or more congruent with recent perspectives offering important insight into some of the imaginative, emotional, and democratic possibilities for reading literature in schools? We believe that teacher-actions such as these will help students create more genuinely co-constructed forms of knowledge regarding the literature they read and its relation to life.

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

Through these transcript analyses mangles, we have tried to demonstrate how literature discussions may be usefully described and theorized as of practice both in the nature of social interactions students were encouraged to take up, as well as in the actual content that discussions engender. Mangles of practice involve the coalescence of planned and contingent forces, and they produce emergent or self-organizing transformations of ongoing social activities and outcomes. The discussions we analyzed did indeed involve both planned and contingent forces deriving from individuals, the group, the novel the children were discussing, various cultural artifacts that were imported into discussions, and a host of other forces. As such, the discussions were emergent phenomena about

which we could almost never predict what precise collections/collisions/collusions of actions and reactions would occur within them or what the effects of these collections/collisions/collusions would be.

In this regard, our findings disclose immense potentials for talk and social interaction that align with recent proposals for re-imagining humanities-based learning that contrast sharply with many prevailing models of what literature study and analysis (or humanities education, more broadly conceived) can and should be and do. In this regard, we were able to explain, at least partially, how texts (their genres and meaning potentials) and activity of literary interpretation were collaboratively produced over time. Central to this production process were (a) the nature and effects of participants' contributions to the ongoing talk and social interaction, (b) the nature and effects of the statuses of individuals within the discussion and the larger activity systems in which it was embedded, (c) the development of the meaning potentials of the *narrative* text being discussed, and (d) the enablements and constraints of disciplinary resources and practices for knowledge building and the interpretation of text and life (e.g., activity genres, text genres, disciplinary conventions, interpretive codes).

Two text genres (*chronicle* and *narrative*) and several activity genres (summarizing, IRE, dialogue, and inferential/poetic/imaginative/moral deliberation) functioned as key enablements and constraints in these discussions. When engaged in summarizing, children typically produced *My Brother Sam is Dead* as a *chronicle*. When engaged in inferential/poetic/imaginative reasoning (especially about potential psychological and sociological causes), the children typically produced the text as a *narrative*. A more abstract or speculative question or response could catalyze the shift from summarizing to more inferential/poetic and moral reasoning and thus from producing *chronicle* to producing *narrative*. Similarly, a more factual, literal question or response could catalyze the shift from inferential and moral reasoning to summarizing and thus from producing *narrative* to producing *chronicle*. When the group was producing *narrative*, the activity genre was much less stable than when they were producing *chronicle*, often shifting from literary interpretation to debate. Finally, the meaning and import of *My Brother Sam is Dead* was different—often dramatically different—depending on the activity genres at play and the concomitant text genres produced at any given time. This is an important point. Narrative production as an activity genre was necessarily related to literary interpretation of a very specific kind. As the students—largely on their own—investigated and imagined the emotional and intellectual lives of characters, they simultaneously engaged in moral and ethical evaluations of the lives of others in ways that perhaps creative narratives, like novels, afford more than other kinds of texts (e.g., McIntyre, 1981; Nussbaum, 1995). The students—again, largely on their own—figured out that stories uniquely enable, invite, or cultivate a style of imagination and a way of seeing beyond the “facts” (for example, what we might accept as given or real in the case of Sam’s character and key events in the story). These ways of imagining self, others, and world are valuable democratic resources because, as Nussbaum (1995) has explained, they cultivate our poetic, metaphoric, and imaginative sensibilities, thus opening up ways of seeing beyond the “facts” an into the minds and hearts of others as they negotiate the exigencies of their lives.

Another important insight about the flow of these discussions is that it was produced to a large extent by the specific kinds of contributions introduced and the specific ways in which these contributions were taken up. Moreover, within certain limits, the productive potential of contributions did not always depend on who offered them. In this regard, certain contributions made by students (especially Katharine and Jen), as well as some made by Ms. G were especially effective with respect to what topics were taken up, whether trafficking in facts or inferences about emotions and motivations had more purchase, and whether certain inferences and interpretations were validated. For example, for whatever reasons, Katherine and Jen occupied high status positions in the classroom in terms of the validity of their

knowledge and interpretations. Also worth noting is the fact that many of the teacher's questions and comments about literal facts drew out exchanges that involved summarizing and producing chronicles. However, when Ms. G was drawn into the dialogic debate about Sam's possible role in stealing the cows, she reframed her typical mode of engagement and perpetuated the dialogicality of the interactions and the production of *narrative*. Without being the least bit pushy (though perhaps somewhat privileged with respect to how often she was nominated by the teacher), Katharine often asked questions or offered interpretations that moved the discussion to higher and higher levels of abstraction, speculation, and inference, especially about emotional and moral dimensions of characters. In fact, her contributions, and the ways in which they were taken up, often resulted in major shifts in activity genre (e.g., from individual summary to collective debate) and text genre (e.g., from *chronicle* to *narrative*). Indeed, we were often amazed by her "power" and the effects that her contributions exerted on the flow of talk and social interaction. Jen, too, offered several ideas, often in the way of pivotal questions, that were taken up by the group and exerted powerful effects on the direction and flow of discussions. For instance, Katherine requested to read her new ending. Ms. G agreed to this shift in activity but nominated a different student to read his new ending, in effect ending what had been a productive discussion. However, before the student began to read, Jen asked a key question that re-ignited the discussion and put the reading of homework on hold. In contrast, some original contributions, such as Edward's "ET go home" chanting and Ali's *Star Trek* stories were not taken up by the group and thus went nowhere. Understanding the dialogical potentials of literature discussions is an important step towards successfully implementing more effective learning interactions in classrooms. Although the process can be messy and unpredictable, the learning potentials of these messy processes are enormous.

The various unique contributions of participants and the specific ways in which they were taken up and evaluated by others were also extremely important factors in governing the direction and flow of discussions. For example, it was often topics that were introduced and pursued by students that produced shifts in text and activity genres. Chief among these were questions and comments that moved the discussion away from focusing on literal facts and precise chronologies and toward more inferential aspects of the text such as characters' emotional states, goals and motivations, complex or ambiguous actions and events, and the juggling of multiple perspectives. Also important were the tasks that students thought were expected or allowable. How, for example, the task of reading a summary was understood by different members of the group exerted powerful effects on the nature and flow of social interactions—calling attention to violations, the relative kinds and amounts of interruptions, etc. How particular students engaged in producing summaries also affected whether *My Brother Sam is Dead* was produced as a *chronicle* or a *narrative*. Additionally, the accumulation of more inferential questions and commentary by some students (especially Katharine and Jen) helped to produce a discussion that, with a few exceptions, became more and more inferential and thus a text that became more and more *narrative* in nature. In short, the unique flows of contributions and their update and evaluation constituted the discussion as an increasingly "distributed" affair focused largely on literary matters often defined by attention to character intentions, motivations, and complex actions.

Finally, several participants in the discussion stand out for the ways in which their contributions—which were often afforded by the roles and status assignments of these participants—affected the direction and flow of discussions. We have already mentioned Katharine's power in this regard. Throughout the discussions of *My Brother Sam is Dead*, Katharine was nominated by the teacher to make contributions more often than many other students. Perhaps this was because she always had her hand raised. Perhaps it was because she fully engaged in almost every discussion topic. Perhaps, at this time in the year, she was a "favorite" of the teacher for whatever reasons (we specify "this time in the

year” because at other times during the year, Katharine was not nominated to speak as often). Or perhaps, for whatever reasons, Katharine was simply on a roll during discussions of this particular book. We really are not sure. This uncertainty notwithstanding, the roles and status assignments ascribed to Katharine in these discussions contributed in significant ways to how the discussions themselves unfolded. Jen’s roles and status assignments stand out as well. Perhaps more than any other student, she repeatedly tried to enter the discussions but was edged out. When she did manage to get in a question or comment, they were usually pithy: they were often taken up by the group, and they often changed nature and flow of the discussions in significant ways. Why was it so difficult for her to enter into the discussions more often? What if she had managed to have voice more often? Where might have the discussions gone then? Finally, at this point in the year and largely because his creative entailments were often so far a field, Ali’s contributions were almost always momentary perturbations that were almost always followed by the equivalent of “O. K., Next” and hardly ever changed the nature and flow of the discussions. In many ways this is ironic because Ali was extremely bright; he almost always read the texts very carefully; and he was very gifted at literary interpretation, so his status in this regard was never in jeopardy. Yet his self-nominated jester role and his off-center and sidelong ways of participating seldom captured the attention or imagination of other group members. These examples suggest both positive and negative potentials with respect to how emergent talk and social interaction produce text and activity structures and meanings. On the one hand, they have tremendous potential for generating new meanings, new connections, new insights, and new interpretive practices in relation to literature and dialogues about literature. On the other hand, they can readily get off track or out of control, producing text and activity structures and meanings that are neither particularly coherent nor generative of new, richer, more complex forms of knowledge and practice. Moreover, they also hold dangerous potentials for reinforcing various hegemonic structures and practices because emergence is unpredictable—always a coalescing unknown.

Thus, a key question for future research is how to create activity spaces with an optimal balance between open, dialogic interaction and orchestration/scaffolding to produce structures and meanings that are maximally generative without degenerating into off-task activity or the hegemony reinforcing discourse. As paradoxical as it may seem, some sort of dynamic and loosely scaffolded improvisation may produce the most effective forms of emergent activity (e.g., Baker-Sennett, Matsuov, & Rogoff, 1993). In this regard, we think that understanding literature discussions (and other pedagogic activities) as “mangles of practice” can allow us to become more in touch with and more mindful of the various forms of agency involved in them and how they might emerge given one action or another. We have begun to explore this issue with several teachers with whom we are currently working. These teachers have found that videotaping and collaboratively analyzing the moment-to-moment unfolding of their classroom activities is incredibly illuminating. They have also found that they have become much more mindful of the fact that how they interact with various forms of agency that populate their classrooms has important consequences for what happens in them and what is learned in them. Indeed, much more research remains to be done on this topic.

Now for some more general (and more theoretical) conclusions and implications. We have tried to demonstrate through our analyses how theories of collaborative emergence are useful for describing (and to some extent explaining) the relations between emergent processes of talk and social interaction and genres (both text genres and activity genres) as emergent phenomena at play during literature discussions. Such a perspective requires that we focus on collective action as our unit of analysis and that we map the turn-by-turn activities of the collective. As individuals work together to co-construct activity and meaning, they co-construct frames that give form to and partially constrain future

contributions of individuals (e.g., Giddens, 1984; Sawyer, 2001a, 2002). But they do not do this alone. Their actions are also enabled and constrained by various material, disciplinary, and conceptual forms of agency that exert invisible effects on the emergence process. Given this notion of structures as structuring structures, until a particular activity is over, researchers really cannot know what any final structures or meanings will be because these structures and meanings are dynamic and always open to negotiation. This means that we must deploy specific kinds of analytic tools, especially various forms of critical discourse analysis (e.g., Gee, 2011; Fairclough, 1992) to show how higher-level structures (e.g., text meanings, activity structures, disciplinary practices, etc.) emerge as a function of the moment-to-moment emergence of talk and social interaction.

This study also suggests that there might be considerable purchase in thinking about both text and activity genres according to a conception of global coherence that is quite different from conceptions offered by most text or activity grammars. Such a conception would be based not on static organization but on processual organization—how text and activity genres as processes rather than entities are organized or in the process of being organized.

Finally, the “mangle of practice” metaphor suggests the value of being more self-reflexive about our disciplinary locations and their effects. In our work with ELA teachers, we have talked about this a lot and come to think about literary interpretation differently. Most of us have durable dispositions rooted in our own educational training (usually new criticism), and these disciplinary dispositions exert powerful effects on our practice. As we study the various “mangles” that constitute different kinds of literature discussions (especially of the same book), we are moving toward a position that is somewhere between new criticism (an overdetermined objectivist position), deconstruction (an overdetermined relativist position), and new historicism (an overdetermined determinist position). We call this form of interpretation a non-correspondence realism or pragmatic realism. Here, the real—whether, genres, meanings, or whatever—is not defined by rules or laws but by what emerges in disciplined practice. These genres and meanings might not be the only or the last genres and practices that emerge, but they are grounded in a real dance of agency among human, material, disciplinary, and conceptual resources.

Literature discussions, then, can be re-imagined as surfaces of emergence through which participants might imaginatively participate in the lives and worlds of others, thus expanding the horizons of their possible selves and possible worlds (Bruner, 1986). Indeed, motivated by the desire to restore the humanities to its liberal educational mission of fostering engaged citizenship and active ownership of ideas, several scholars have recently sought to re-imagine the humanities and humanities-based educational frameworks as vehicles for building socially engaged and tangible relations with the real world (e.g., Ellison & Eatman, 2008; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Klein, 2005; Spellmeyer, 2003). As Nikitina (2009) and others have made clear, “fostering the ability to own (enact and embody) a literary, philosophical, or historical insight should be central to humanities learning.” As it pertains to literature discussion and the teaching of literature, instructional approaches that encourage an exclusive focus on literal facts or theoretical readings or the rote transmission of conceptual information without a complementary focus on the exploration of how such ideas might translate into tangible action or application is thought to be a serious failure of humanities education in the current era. Although tangible action or enactment can take many forms, including the embodiment of abstract concepts through media and the arts, it may also involve providing students with opportunities to cultivate critical sensibilities for engaged citizenship through engaged forms of social interaction that might lead towards social action and participation in community-based projects, initiatives, or movements (Ganz, 2010; Nikitina, 2009).

Within this new imaginal, the knowledge produced within them is simultaneously objective, relative, and historical. Indeed, at this historical juncture of theorizing and researching literature discussions, we think it would be productive to move beyond all forms of criticism and interpretation grounded in a representational idiom—whether new criticism, deconstruction, new historicism, and even reader response theory—and toward a more performative approach to understanding the complex activity of reading and talking about texts. Such an approach would be based neither on a priori (and thus discoverable) organizational schemes, nor on endless chains of deferrals, but on real time processual organization itself: how material, conceptual, disciplinary, and human forms of agency come to be organized in real time in real classrooms.

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Appendix: Transcription Key (Adapted from Atkinson & Heritage, 1984)

underline marks emphatic stress

CAPS mark very emphatic stress

: indicates a lengthened vowel sound (extra colons indicate greater lengthening)

(X) indicates a word we could not decipher (extra Xs indicate additional words)

((double parentheses)) contain contextualization commentary

= indicates utterances latched on to one another, without perceptible pauses

[brackets between lines indicate overlapping speech

?: indicates unidentified speaker

// indicates that speaker never finished her/his utterance; quite often another speaker will initiate a turn soon thereafter



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