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Research on Communicative Practices in an Alternative Classroom

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Research on Communicative Practices in an Alternative School Classroom

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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“If humans learned to be human, then it followed that teaching and learning could be thought of as the primary adaptive specialization of the human species . . .” (Frederick Erickson 2011:27).

Chapter 1: Introduction

A. The Framework of the Study

This study adopts an ethnographic approach to investigate communicative practices and children’s participative role in an alternative school classroom. This study was conducted in a United States public school (on here referred as “the school”) that defines itself as a democratic school and that seeks the progressive value of children's active participation in learning. In this school, the participative role of children is also expanded into the school’s governance, that is, the students participate and vote in the school’s decisions and help adults to run the school. Thus, this study describes a different model of schooling in which students are expected to actively participate in the school and classroom. More specifically, the study investigates how the school's values that seek children's active participation and children's initiative can be reflected in classroom communications.

The study falls within Linguistic Anthropology and uses theories and studies of other subfields of Anthropology or related fields, such as classroom interaction, classroom discourse, language socialization, anthropology of education, and language ideologies. The study adopts some theoretical and analytic perspectives of conversation analysis to conduct discourse analysis on a specific form of students’ questions of their teacher.

B. The Problem of the Study

Democratic schools differ from other schools by socializing their students through their schooling into democratic values and rules that are at the base of the functioning of institutions in society (Chamberlin 1989; Apple and Beane 2007). Some of the highlights of democratic schools' values in relation to children's active participation are as follows: some degree of the children's involvement in the decision about what will be learned (Chamberlin 1989; IDEN 2018; Apple and Beane 2007); some degree
of children's participation in the school's decisions and rules (Chamberlin 1989; IDEN 2018; Apple and Beane 2007); and promotion of students' critical thinking (Apple and Beane 2007).

Democratic schools and progressive schools are not dissimilar in educational principles, democratic schools received contributions from the work of the earlier progressive movement (Apple and Beane 2007, 23) and employed some progressive methods in their classroom practices (see discussion in examples of democratic schools in Apple and Beane 2007).

Even though many authors have pointed out that one of the main marks of progressive education is the concern with the active participation of children in their learning (Gambi 1999; Semel 1999; Pulliam 1991), there is no monolithic definition of progressive education. Arthur Zilversmit (1993) explains that a lack of a definition is because along the years the progressive’s ideas have been applied in different ways or received different emphasis by progressive educators. However, Zilversmit (1993) points out that progressives agreed (around the 1920s and 1930s) on some common characteristics among different progressive education approaches. Zilversmit (1993, 18) lists these common characteristics as follows:

1) The adoption of a child-centered curriculum (in contrast to subject-centered program) to foster children’s natural desire to learn.

2) The goal to educate the whole child by considering the child’s physical, emotional, and intellectual needs.¹

3) The children’s “active role” in the decisions about what they will learn. Some progressives also understood that schools had the goal to teach students to become active members of society.²

When contrasting formal to progressive education, Gary Thomas (2013, 30-31) provides a list of the main teaching values that can typically be found in progressive education. Some of the teaching

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¹ Arthur Zilversmit (1993, 18) explains that progressives disagree on how these different needs should be balanced within the curriculum, especially “on how much emphasis on subject matter should remain” in the curriculum.

² Zilversmit (1993, 18) also points out that there is no agreement among progressives about the children’s degree involvement in this process. Zilversmit (1993) adds that there is also less agreement on the role of the school in teaching students to become active leaders of the society or the involvement of students in projects that aim to improve society beyond classroom.
values in Thomas’ (2013) list related to children's active participation in learning are as follows: instigating "discovery learning"; promoting "learning by doing"; learning by "problem solving"; "teach[ing] the child to think, to be independent, [and] to be critical"; encouraging motivation for learning through "absorption in the work itself"; promoting learning through "group and individual work" and by a "mentor-apprentice relationship" with the teacher; and stimulating "development from within" children.

It is not clear how the progressive values take form through the interactions between teacher and students in alternative classrooms. To my knowledge, to date, there have not been extensive studies in alternative classroom in the fields of classroom interaction and classroom discourse. A large corpus of the literature in classroom interaction and classroom discourse is dedicated to studying interactions and discourse adopted by teachers and students in more traditional settings. This study addresses this gap in the scientific literature about the nature of communications in alternative classrooms. As an ethnography of the communications, this research also contributes to the field of linguistic anthropology and anthropology of education by describing a different model of education in which students are socialized to show initiative in classroom talk and actively involve themselves in school affairs.

C. Overview of the Chapters

Beyond the Introduction chapter, this study was divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 2 presents the background literature that informed this study. One of the key points addressed in this chapter is the main type of interaction (Initiation-Reply-Feedback) adopted in American schools; this discussion includes the criticism and arguments in favor of the use of this type of interaction as a main form of teaching in classrooms. The discussion also addresses how the use of this type of interaction relates to students’ participation in classroom talk. Chapter 2 includes a discussion of two studies that suggest that students’ participation in classroom talk can be enhanced by teacher’s opening the floor to students’ initiations and with teacher’s mediation of classroom talk. Also, contributions from other fields for the understanding of academic disparities in classrooms were brought into the discussion. These fields include language socialization, anthropology of education, and language ideologies. Lastly, the chapter addresses the
theoretical and analytical tools adopted in this study, i.e., the linguistic anthropology and conversation analysis concepts that limited the object of this study or were employed in chapter 5, in the analysis of the classroom communications.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology adopted in this study. Some of the points addressed in this chapter include the research question, the materials that composed the ethnographic record, the processes of selecting the participants and obtaining their consent, the type of data collected, and the methods used to analyze the data.

Chapter 4 presents the context of the studied school. The chapter includes a presentation of the school curriculum, its beliefs, and its democratic structures. A key point of this chapter is a description of a central school concept to understand the “hidden” curriculum3 of the school, the concept of “habits.” The chapter discusses a possible connection between the “initiative habit” and the presence of students’ initiations and questions in the classrooms. The chapter also includes some adult participants’ perspectives (from teachers and staff participating in the study) about the importance of the habits for the students’ success in the school, the participants’ reflections on the challenges and positives aspects of students’ participation in alternative classrooms, and some aspects of the school ideology that are revealed by staff’s dealing with students’ misbehavior and assessing students’ academic performance.

Chapter 5 lays out the analysis of the communications in one of the classrooms observed and audio recorded in this study and reports the study findings. The analysis starts with the participating students’ initiations recorded during the classroom discussions, and then it focuses on the participating students’ questions. A discourse analysis drawn from the conversation-analysis approach was used to analyze a specific sequence of interaction between the teacher and the students, termed an inserted question sequence (or insertion sequence), that refers to a form by which some participating students

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3 The term “hidden curriculum” is often used by scholars in diverse scientific fields of research in education and teaching practices. Douglas Barnes (1992), a scholar who researched language and learning in classrooms, explains that hidden curriculum refers to the social learning that students acquire in school, that is, the expected behavior that students should attain. Barnes argues that classroom communications are part of a school’s hidden curriculum. He also asserts that both hidden curriculum and manifest curriculum (which refers to course content) are part of the school curriculum.
asked questions. This sequence and its variations are analyzed case by case using conversation analysis literature as a reference.

Chapter 6 presents the discussion of the findings laid out in the analysis chapter. Among the points raised are some possible explanations for the high frequency of students’ questions and for the presence of students’ inserted questions in classroom talk. The findings are also discussed in light of the relevant literature; this discussion raises some possible implications of this study. Another key point addressed in this chapter is the limitations of this study.

Chapter 7 summarizes the main findings of this study. The findings suggest that communicative practices in alternative classrooms are not restricted to the use of IRF sequences and that students may take a more active role in classroom talk when the floor and the IRF sequences are more flexibly managed by teachers.

**Chapter 2: Theoretical Background**

Below, I set forth the background discussions and analyses that informed this study on communicative practices in an alternative classroom. Note that the analyses and discussions presented in this chapter mainly refer to traditional classroom contexts.

**A. Classroom Interaction and Classroom Discourse**

The classroom discourse and classroom interaction fields of inquiry have extensively described a style of interaction adopted in American and English-speaking countries classrooms.\(^4\) This style is known

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\(^4\) These fields have different theoretical roots and methodologies. In general terms, classroom discourse is focused on the different linguistic and discourse choices adopted by participants and how the language adopted or created by participants in classroom may impact the “social and academic knowledge construction.” (Rex and Green 2008, 571). This field also studies how language use is influenced by, or influences, the content of a required curriculum. Classroom interaction research generally focuses on the “behaviors” and “strategies” employed by students and teachers in a classroom, with the goal of determining which behaviors and strategies correspond with different levels of academic performance (Rex and Green 2008, 571).
as the IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) sequence or IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback). Below, I highlight some aspects and discussions relative to this style.

1. IRF Sequence as a Default

American and British classroom talk has been characterized by the use of the IRF sequence as a main style of teaching (Mehan 1979; Cadzen 1988; Christie 2002; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). When this style of interaction is adopted, teachers are in charge of posing the questions and students are in charge of replying to them.

Literature in classroom interaction and classroom discourse had demonstrated that in traditional classrooms children's participation in the lessons may be restricted to answering questions posed by the teacher. According to Hugh Mehan's analysis (1979, 80), children contribute a small amount (17.9%) of the interactional initiations in the classroom, and, when they do, most of their initiations are of the informative type (12%), while elicitations (children’s questions) represents a smaller number (4.0 %) of the children’s initiations. J. McH. Sinclair and R. M. Coulthard (1975, 52) found a similar conclusion in England; they point out that children rarely ask questions, and, when they do, the questions are mostly about procedures or permission to do something. These analyses have suggested that children in traditional classrooms may ask few questions to pursue their own inquiry about knowledge.

Recently, some scholars have criticized the IRE style of interaction when it is adopted in a simplified way, in a style of teaching known as a “recitation lecture” or “recitation script” (Skidmore 2000; Alexander 2005; Nystrand 1997; Barnes 1992). The recitation lecture consisted of a rigid format of a series of closed-ended questions posed by a teacher that can be answered with short answers by the students. By adopting this style, teachers quantitatively maximize students’ participation, either obtaining a larger number of replies from a large number of students at once or short answers from many individual students. (Alexander 2005). David Skidmore explains (2000, 503) that these scholars are concerned with the repetitive and “predominant pattern of teacher-student interaction exposed by empirical observation studies” and its effectiveness in terms of student’s reasoning and understanding.
Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin’s\(^5\) (1985-1975) writing about the *dialogic* essence of language (Skidmore 2000), many of these scholars propose other ways of interactions between teacher and students to promote dialogue in classrooms by which students could “play an active part in shaping the agenda of classroom discourse” (Skidmore 2000, 503). These scholars, in general, argue that, to enhance the exchange of knowledge and promote understanding, it is necessary to promote students’ effective participation in the classroom talk. Skidmore (2000, 503) cites some proposals formulated by these scholars to promote dialogue in classrooms, which are as follows: the teacher’s adoption of students’ ideas; opportunities for students to change the topics; promotion of learning through collaborative work and peer assistance; and stimulating students to paraphrase the content of lessons in their own words.

In relation to classroom discourse, some authors shift their criticism to other aspects of classroom talk. Derek Edwards and Neil Mercer (1987, 45), for example, affirm that they are not so concerned with the IRF pattern of interaction itself. Among their concerns, the authors point out students’ lack of awareness about the *ground rules*\(^6\) that operate in classroom talk and students’ lack of comprehension of the different discourses characteristic of each subject matter, concerns that could affect students’ learning (1987, 128).\(^7\) However, Edwards and Mercer (1987, 45) recognize that the IRF sequence also involves the understanding of *ground-rules* of social interaction, the subtle clues of how to participate in academic talking. For students to appropriately interact in classrooms, as the authors pointed out, students need to

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\(^5\) Peter Neville Rule explains that Bakhtin “understands speech, language and life itself as dialogic” (2015, 35). The following passage from Bakhtin (1984) confirms his views on the dialogic nature of life and explains in which ways he understands that humans are inherently in constant dialogue with others and nature: “Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds” (Rule 2015, 35).

\(^6\) By drawing on Paul Grice’s (1975) concept of ground rules, Derek Edwards and Neil Mercer (1987) define the concept as “a set of implicit understandings that participants in conversation need to possess, over and above any strictly linguistic knowledge, in order to make proper sense of what each other is trying to say, or trying to achieve in saying something” (42).

\(^7\) Edwards and Mercer (1987, 48) report that the most common misunderstandings between teacher and students cited in the literature are related to the “specific subject matter of lessons,” the “purpose of goals of activities,” and the “criteria that children were being judged against.” In relation to each subject matter, Edwards and Mercer (1987, 54) explain that diverse subjects in the curriculum, such as mathematics, history, and science, have their own discourses and that not all students are familiar with the particularities of these discourses.
understand that “it is the teacher who asks the questions,” “the teacher knows the answers,” and “repeated questions imply wrong answers” (Edward and Mercer 1987, 45).

On the other hand, other scholars stress that the IRF sequence by itself is not inherently unfavorable for promoting students' reasoning and that what matters is how the teacher employs this interactional resource (van Lier 1996; Wells 1999; Zemel and Koschmann 2011). Gordon Wells (1999) demonstrates that teachers’ feedback act of the IRF sequence also can be used for different purposes other than issuing an evaluation, such as to “clarify, exemplify, expand, explain, or justify a student’s response; or to request the student to do any of these things” (Skidmore 2000, 507). Therefore, when IRF sequences are adopted in these ways, the sequence may induce classroom talk that promotes students’ understanding and reasoning.

In the same line of thought, Leo van Lier (1996) analyzed the use of the IRF sequence in detail and identified many types of IRF. Van Lier also argues that different types may serve different purposes in a classroom. The IRF pattern, as he argues, "is effective in maintaining order, regulating participation, and leading the students in a certain predetermined direction” (156). However, van Lier stresses that the IRF pattern “often reduces the student's initiative, independent thinking, clarity of expression, development of conversational skills (including turn taking, planning ahead, negotiating, and arguing) and self determination” (1996, 156). He points out that some explorations of the IRF sequence, such as the IRF type used in the “Socratic method”8 (van Lier 1996, 180), can lead students "towards a participation orientation, clear thinking, and precise expression" (van Lier 1996, 156). Nevertheless, van Lier clarifies that "all IRF-based dialogs share the basic feature that the roles of questioner and answerer are rigidly separated” (1996, 80).

Based on scholars’ criticisms and different perspectives in relation to the use of the IRF sequence, Hansun Waring (2013) summarizes this debate by pointing out that the use of the IRF sequence as a

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8 The Socratic method is named after the classical Greek philosopher Socrates, who used this method of teaching. The method is based on questioning in which an instructor’s question is formulated in response to a student’s specific answer. Some of the goals of the method are to lead the student toward a specific line of argumentation and to critically assess non-examined preconceptions and judgments about a specific topic.
principal a way of teaching and learning in classrooms still “remains unchallenged” (191).

In relation to the IRF sequence as a main mechanism of interaction in classrooms, different scholars (Alexander 2005; Waring 2009) reported that the IRF sequence is not the unique interaction adopted in classrooms in the United States and that there is also some variability in teaching styles (Alexander 2005). In relation to the variability of the use of the IRF sequence, Alexander (2005) points out that, beyond of the IRF recitation style, there is another version of it adopted in British and American schools influenced by progressive education. Alexander (2005, 03) describes that in these schools a style of IRF prevails; he termed it pseudo-inquiry script. This script, according to Alexander, was characterized by a succession of "unfocused" and "unchallenged" open questions by teachers, in which the students’ responses are positively evaluated but not specifically addressed by the teacher. However, it is not clear how the conclusions of Alexander's study can be generalized for all sorts of progressive or alternative schools. More specifically, it is not clear whether the pseudo-inquiry is a prominent characteristic of all alternative schools or whether this is the only pattern of interaction identified in these school classrooms.

Yet in terms of variability of patterns of interaction in classroom, Waring (2009) found that in an ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom, the teacher and students abandoned the IRF sequence of interaction at the end of a homework check and adopted another format of interaction, in which students posed questions to the teacher and the teacher assumed the role of the answerer. Waring shows that a student’s question was a “pivot” of a series of other subsequent students’ questions; the pivot student’s question introduced a student-question interactive sequence in the classroom. This sequence of students’ questions, according to Waring (2009, 816), allowed students to raise a wider variety of issues and therefore to learn in depth the topic that the teacher was previously exploring through a series of IRF sequences.

In Waring’s (2009) analysis, a new interaction sequence emerged because a student was able to ask a question in the appropriate moment during an ongoing teacher’s series of IRF sequences during a

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9 Robin Alexander (2005), in a broader comparative study encompassing schools in many countries, reports that styles of interactions other than the IRF sequence were adopted in classrooms.
homework check activity. In Waring’s study, the student asked a question after being nominated by the teacher to answer a teacher’s IRF question. First, the student answered the teacher’s IRF question and then the student asked the question. This situation, as Waring explained, was also coordinated with the teacher’s opening the floor for students’ questions and contributions at the end of a homework check activity. According to Waring, the student’s question introduced a new participation structure (students’ initiated Q-A sequences) in the classroom that allowed other students to ask the teacher a series of questions. Waring’s (2009) analysis confirmed Mehan’s (1979) findings that students’ question or other type of students’ initiation is generally projected between two IRF sequences. In Mehan’s own words: “The appropriate juncture for students to gain access to the floor is after an initiation-reply-evaluation sequence, not after any speaker turn” (1979, 140).

Therefore, if a student wants to ask a question during a class, a student must find the appropriate moment. This ability to identify the appropriate moment presupposes that the student possesses interactional competence (Mehan 1979) to interact and participate in classroom talk. Mehan (1979) demonstrates that during the first years of elementary school young children learned to distinguish these junctures and use them to initiate an interaction with the teacher. However, a corpus of literature points out that not all students know the implicit rules of socio-interaction to participate in traditional classroom talk (see discussion on section B in this chapter).

This last discussion of students’ questions suggests that students’ opportunities to raise questions are constrained to teachers’ rigid use of IRF sequences. This discussion also suggests that, for students to ask questions during IRF sequences, students need to know the tacit rules that indicate the right moments to ask a question.

Next, I discuss some rules that that students should follow to access the floor to effectively participate in traditional classroom talk. These rules also relate to how students should obtain the floor to raise questions. I explain how these rules are related to teachers’ management of the floor and to their accomplishment of the class agenda. These rules may play a role in limiting the participation of certain groups of young children and may impact these students’ memberships in classrooms. I also present two
studies suggesting that teachers’ management of classroom talk can be altered to favor the participation of certain groups of students, and, consequently, students’ inclusion in classroom talk.

2. Teacher Authority, Social Order in Classroom, and Participant Competence

In schools, social order in a classroom is established and managed by the teacher. Celia Oyler (1996) explains that teachers have a dual authority in a classroom that they can exert by two interconnected ways: by guiding the talk process and by knowing and controlling the content of the classes. In organizing and conducting the classroom talk, teachers exert direct control of the floor by choosing the styles of interaction and therefore managing students’ opportunities to participate in the talk.

Mehan (1979) argues that the teachers’ concern with order in classrooms has a utilitarian purpose because teachers have to follow an agenda and need to organize lessons to accomplish that agenda. The organization of lessons, according to Mehan (1980, 137), is regulated by the practical concerns of teachers, such as the pedagogical goals, manners and discipline needed for a respectful interaction, and the necessity to ensure “equal opportunities for expression and development.” For the classroom lessons to be accomplished, as Mehan (1980) points out, participants need to interact in a way that the teacher’s agenda can be reached. This implies a social organization that is established by the interaction of all participants, even though the teacher has the role of organizing interactions (Mehan 1979, 83).

By researching in an American school, Mehan (1979, 83) found that the teacher and students engage in “turn-allocation machinery.” This turn-allocation procedure refers to, according to Mehan (1979, 84), the three ways in which students are selected to participate in the lessons: by individual nomination, by invitation to bid, and by invitation to reply. Mehan (1979, 95; 103) clarifies that even

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10 Teacher authority can also come from status of age (adult/child) and often status of class (middle/working class) (Bonvillain 1993, 381).

11 According to Hugh Mehan (1979, 84-94), individual nomination occurs when teachers select a particular student to speak. Invitation to bid, as Mehan explains, occurs when teachers invite students to raise their hands if they know the answer to a teacher’s question. In that instance, a teacher chooses one of the students who raised a hand. Invitation to reply, as Mehan adds, involves situations when students are collectively called to answer a teacher’s question.
though these are the rules operating in most of interactions between teacher and students, these rules are not always followed. Moreover, as Mehan (1979) adds, children are not passive in this interaction and accomplish their own agendas even following the rules of interaction the classroom.

Mehan (1979) extended the scope of the concept of *communicative competence* (Hymes 1971; see discussion below) to refer to *competent participation* in classrooms. He used the concept to analyze how students are challenged to use the language in academic settings in to master and exhibit their knowledge and conform to the rules of interaction. Mehan (1979) found that an effective participation of a student requires not only the accumulation of academic knowledge but also the use of social-interactional skills, such as knowing when to request the floor to talk. In classroom contexts, students are expected to “provide substantially correct academic content” and “in the appropriate form” (Mehan 1980, 137). Thus, a *competent student* would be a student who is able to do so.

However, the rules underlying *competent participation* in a classroom may not favor academically all students. Note that these rules are inherently connected to the IRF style of interaction adopted as a default mode of interaction by teachers. As Nancy Bonvillain (1993, 382) pointed out, teachers’ “insistence on individualized answers” that may seem “natural” are a source of discomfort for particular groups of children, such as Native American children (see discussion referent to an indigenous ethnic group in the section B in this chapter). A teacher’s awareness that not all students were socialized to promptly follow the IRF pattern interaction seems to be a determining factor for the teachers to properly evaluate these students (see discussion on this issue on section B of this chapter). Moreover, under teachers’ authority as guides of the talk in classrooms, it is possible to rethink teaching practices to accommodate non-mainstream young children’s ways of participating.

One example of a teacher’s classroom accommodation of non-mainstream children is provided by Oyler’s (1996) study. Oyler analyzed the talk in an early education classroom in which the teacher abandoned the IRF sequence as the main form of interaction to accommodate a group of non-mainstream children and improve their academic performance. As Oyler reports (1996), the teacher opened the “floor” for the children’ initiations during a specific activity; in that activity, the teacher read aloud books
and discussed them with the children. Oyler (1996) analyzed the turn-taking sequences during the read-aloud activities to observe a variety of the students’ initiations. She found that students initiated a great part of the talking and were able to use different types of initiations.

Their initiations, as Oyler (1996) reports, were as follows: directing the process of the lessons; questioning the teacher for better understanding; commenting on the text; expressing personal experience in relation to the content of the book; claiming expertise about content (which was corrected by the teacher when not accurate); and establishing intertextual links between books. Oyler (1996) argues that sharing authority with the students should not be interpreted as a withdrawal or absence of the teacher’s authority in a classroom because teachers have the authority that comes from their knowledge. This teacher’s approach, as Oyler (1996) points out, gave the students opportunity “to connect and extend the understanding from texts with their own knowledge and their own lives” (158).

Another study of student accommodation in a classroom is reported by Lesley Rex (2000). Rex (2000) analyzed a ninth-grade classroom, that included learning disabled, English as a Second Language (ESL), and gifted and talented (GATE) students. Rex reported that this classroom was formed as part of a long experimental project (Academic Foundations for Success – AFS) to promote students’ academic achievement as an alternative to the tracking system. Rex (2000) argues that interactional inclusive practices in classrooms should review the role of the teacher in pursuing conditions to produce “active participation of the students with learning disabilities through particular discourse practices” (317).

One of the strategies of the experimental project was, according to Rex, to teach students to “make genuine questions.” These questions were used as a heuristic device to provoke “critical thinking” and favored “problem solving” (Rex 2000, 328). The “genuine questions” strategy had one dimension related to the content of the curriculum (how to solve a math problem or ask a question about content in a book, for example) and a social dimension, as Rex (2000) points out. This social dimension was related to
learning how to ask questions in an appropriate moment, finding out the appropriate contexts, and asking the questions properly (Rex 2000, 320).\textsuperscript{12}

The *genuine questions* apprenticeship, according to Rex (2000), was conducted by encouraging students participate in the classroom talk with the teacher’s mediation. Rex (2000) reports that the teacher had the role of mediating the participation in a way that a student’s contribution was socially recognized and acknowledged by the other students and that the contribution was meaningful for students’ literacy.\textsuperscript{13} Rex’s (2000, 03) analysis suggests that the definition of capability (i.e., *participant competence*) in classrooms can be “redefined socially” by a teacher’s mediation.

In this first section of this chapter, I presented the IRF sequence within a larger context of literature, by exposing different authors’ considerations about the use of this sequence in classrooms. I also presented the rules of student participation in classroom talk that are intrinsically related to teachers’ use of IRF sequences. I pointed out that, while these rules may not impede students to ask questions in classrooms, the rules may limit the opportunities of students to do so. Finally, I pointed out that the rules of participation also may not be a common ground for all groups of students, such as non-mainstream children. The final two studies presented here suggest that participation of a diversity of students in a classroom may be enhanced with the adoption of other teachers’ styles of interactions and teachers’ mediation of classroom talk. These teaching strategies could be considered child-centered practices because they respond to different students’ needs in a way to favor the active participation in classroom talk.

\textsuperscript{12} Interestingly, the last dimension consisted of the disclosure to students of the tacit rules for classroom interaction, that is, some of the *interactional rules*, described by Mehan (1979), regarding students’ participation in classroom talk.

\textsuperscript{13} Lesley Rex (2000, 316) also reports that a learning-disabled student “achieved social affiliation and academic ‘success’” at the end of the term. Rex (2000) stresses that the teacher served as a mediator in this process, by helping the student to reformulate a question, evaluating positively a student’s question, and showing to the group that an imperfectly articulated question has an important value as well. This mediation, as Rex (2000) concludes, favored the acceptance of the student in the classroom as a legitimate contributor to the group.
I turn now to discuss some theoretical contribution of language socialization, a field of inquiry that has further investigated the relation of early language socialization of non-mainstream children and schooling.

**B. Language Socialization**

The objective of the field is to analyze how individuals “become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process” (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986, 167). This objective when applied to classroom membership, it would analyze how students become competent members (or displaying a *competence participation*) in the classroom.\(^{14}\)

The field includes two major areas of socialization: “socialization through the use of language and socialization to use the language” (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986, 163). The first refers to “the notion that individuals acquire socio-cultural knowledge, skills, and values by witnessing and participating in verbal interactions and speech routines” (Riley 2008, 398). The second refers to the idea that through social interactions individuals acquire not only *linguistic competence* (Chomsky 1965) but also knowledge to use language as a social tool to express themselves in appropriate ways according to cultural rules of their community. This last use of language is what Dell Hymes (1971) termed as *communicative competence* (Riley 2008, 398). With respect to school settings, children are challenged to master these two competences, that is, students are expected to display the knowledge that they acquired in correct grammatical form (*linguistic competence*), both written and spoken, through a form of behavior that is culturally valid in classrooms (*communicative competence*).

\(^{14}\) Stanton Wortham (2005, 96) explains that when language socialization theory is applied to analyze academic practices, students are seen playing the role of “novices.” Wortham (2005) adds that through repetitive series of interactions with “experts,” the teachers, the students will become competent members of that community, i.e., the classroom. This development, as Wortham (2005) explains, is accomplished in a significant part through language use, which involves the acquisition of “pragmatic” and “semantic competence[s]” in academic contexts. Wortham (2005) also poses that researchers should also study individual trajectories of socialization within the classrooms. This strategy allows researchers to identify through a series of speech encounters, that are temporally and meaningfully linked (also known as *speech chains* [Agha 2003]), how different social identity trajectories were constructed through these encounters with other individuals in the group.
The field of inquiry language socialization has brought some insights not only in which ways children may become members in a classroom, but also how some children coming from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds may experience socialization within the schools, and the relationship between pattern of interaction and language use in home and elementary school contexts (Riley 2008, 406). Below, I introduce two classic studies that illustrate these insights.

Shirley Heath's (1982) study focuses on the participation of children from different socio-cultural backgrounds in classrooms and the effect of earlier literacy practices in the academic performance of these pre-school children. Shirley studied three communities in the southeastern United States and demonstrates that mainstream children (from African American and white middle-class families) who were earlier socialized into literacy practices by activities with books through the types of interactions used in formal classrooms succeeded well in early education.

One of the main reasons for the mainstream children's academic “success,” according to Heath (1982, 51), is that their families adopted a model of interaction (IRF sequence) used by teachers, therefore favoring the mainstream children to match their participation in classroom talk with the one used by the teachers. Besides, the mainstream families also trained their children to relate the knowledge from the books to other contexts. Heath observed that working-class and African-American working-class families did not socialize their children to some or all practices adopted by the teachers in early education, such as teaching them to decontextualize the information from books; using books as way of playing, and therefore initiating literacy; or interacting with their children using a similar version of the IRF sequence. These factors, according Heath (1982), were important to explain the working-class children’s lower academic performance.

Susan Philips’ (1970) study focuses on the reasons for the lower academic performance of American-Indian children of the Warm Springs reservation, in Oregon. Philips investigated the types of participant structures adopted by the teacher at the school. Participant structures are, as the author explains, frameworks that allow teachers to control verbal interactions with students in different ways depending on the activity proposed by the teacher. Philips found that the teacher in the school organized
the classes by using four types of *participant structures*. By comparing how Indian children and non-Indian children participated in each of these frameworks, Philips (2001, 308) noticed that Indian children performed poorly or were less willing to interact verbally in some *participant structures*. These participant structures encompassed situations in which an Indian child was supposed to individually speak or must speak by request of the teacher in front of other students.

However, Indian children, as Philips reports, were observed positively responding to a particular type of *participant structure*, in which a student could initiate a private interaction with the teacher at the teacher’s desk. Philips also reports that Indian children could autonomously work in their assignments when they were in small groups of students. Philips (1970, 308-09) concludes that Indian children’s positive responses were related to two types of circumstances. The first circumstance occurred when Indian children participated in group activities that did “not create[] a distinction between individual performance and audience,” and the second occurred when Indian children could autonomously decide when speak and act without being asked or directed by the teacher (1970, 308-09).

According to Philips (1970), Indian children’s negative responses to the other participant structures can be explained by their socialization process. In their community, Indian children are used to learning by observation, without verbal instruction from adults. Tasks are practiced in private by Indian children, with autonomy and without adult supervision. Indian children practice their tasks until children can feel confident that they are able to perform well before other members in the community. These styles of learning and way of demonstration of skills were mostly absent in the *participant structures* adopted

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15 According to Philips (1970), the first *participation structure* involves the teacher’s addressing all students or a single student in front of the large group. The second participant structure involves the teacher’s interacting with small groups separately. In the second case, most of the time students are expected to speak and participate individually while being watched by colleagues in the small group. The third *participant structure* involves the teacher’s being available to each student if the student needed it. In this participant structure, students are working individually, but any student can initiate the interaction with the teacher who is at the teacher’s desk. Note that in this *participant structure* other students do not witness the exchanges between the individual student and the teacher. The fourth *participant structure* is less frequent in lower grades, Philips explains. According to her, it consists of students working in small groups to perform a group project, usually in the presence of a “leader.” Philips (1970) explains that in this last participant framework Indian students could perform the activities with a higher degree of autonomy.
by the teachers in the school. Note that Indian children were more comfortable in situations in which they could initiate private interactions with the teacher and in which they could have more autonomy over their academic work.

These analyses indicate that socio-cultural factors related to children’s early socialization may play a substantial role in how students might participate in classrooms and on students’ academic performance.

Next, I present the point of view of Anthropology of Education on the dynamic between social-cultural factors and formal schooling.

C. Anthropology of Education

Anthropology of Education is a subfield of Anthropology that studies both aspects of informal and formal processes of teaching and learning. Frederick Erickson (2011, 26) explains that anthropologists, in general, have tended to pay more attention to informal settings, while anthropologists of education have considered both informal and formal settings. The field, as Erickson (2011) points out, was born in the late 1960s as a reaction to the use of “cultural deficit” label in both “professional education and child development research” (29).

The “cultural deficit” label, as Erickson (2011, 30) reports, still persists today, with the idea that “cultural deficits” need to be addressed by the education system. As Erickson explains (2011), there is an effort in the education system to teach students from different socio-cultural backgrounds the mainstream ways of behavior to enhance these students’ academic success. Erickson (1984) questions the use of the “cultural deficit” label because it is used to explain particular racial and ethnic groups’ lower academic achievement by reference to individuals or specific groups alone. By reviewing a series of multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary analyses on the relationship among literacy, reasoning abilities, reasoning skills,

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16 Anthropology of education research conducted in formal schooling, as Frederick Erickson (2011, 26-30) reports, has investigated the “implicit as well as explicit teaching of values, beliefs, and communication styles” (i.e., the hidden or tacit curriculum), “the explicit teaching of subject matter” (i.e., the manifest curriculum), and “the unintended consequences of instruction.”
and schooling, Erickson (1984, 529-30) holds that “the notion of individual ability” is “socially constituted rather than as context independent and located inside the individual alone.”

By drawing on Scriber and Cole’s (1981) study, Erickson (1984, 529) argues that individual capabilities are linked to the social-cultural context in which the capabilities were acquired and to the “materials” used to perform a task or an activity, such as tools or symbols. Erickson (1984) stresses that changes in the “physical forms of tools and symbols” or “in the social forms of relations” can affect the “nature of the interaction—the nature of the learning task” (529). Social context in schools, as Erickson (1984) explains, is to a large extent influenced by the social relations between teacher and learner, which are mediated by the pattern of communications adopted in classrooms. Therefore, a mismatch between a style of communication of the teacher and of a student may interfere with a student’s learning task.

Similarly, the anthropologist Mica Pollock (2008) criticizes “shallow” analyses about “achievement gaps” only looking for explanations on racial, ethnic, nation-origin, or social assumptions about how children have been raised. Pollock (2008) points out that these analyses are dangerous and oversimplify “the social process, interaction, and practices that create disparate outcomes for children” (369). Therefore, an assessment of the reasons for different groups of students’ lower academic performances would have to include an assessment of the whole system of teaching practices.

At this point of the discussion it is necessary to clarify the concept of culture and its scope in a cultural study of a classroom. So far, I have used the term to refer to a diversity of students, to different styles of teaching, and to learning styles in classrooms. In this study, the concept of culture used to analyze the communicative practices in an alternative classroom is the one suggested by Pollock (2008). Pollock (2008) explains her concept of culture when she advocates for a deep analysis to study culture in school settings. She holds that when anthropologists are studying culture in classrooms, they “are studying the organization of people’s everyday interactions in concrete contexts” (Pollock 2008, 369). In

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17 Mica Pollock’s (2008) proposal of deep description of classroom practices accords with Clifford Geertz’s (1973) explanation about his ethnographic analysis proposal expressed in his concept of thick description. Geertz (1973) asserts that ethnographers should interpret the meaning of actions and discourses in the social context of that culture and consider the actors’ point of view in the ethnographic interpretation.
this sense, *culture* also encompasses the activities and social relations that teachers and students establish to pursue their respective agendas in their encounters.

Besides incorporating the classroom setting as space of *culture*, anthropologists of education have stressed the necessity to work with a more dynamic understanding of the concept of culture when analyzing schools, teaching, and learning (Erickson 2011; Pollock 2008). For example, Erickson (2011, 31) argues that we should not assume cultural homogeneity within a social group because there is variability among individuals within a group. Also, he (2011) points out, anthropologists of education should not assume that cultural learning is confined to childhood, but something that occurs throughout life, as well as “cultural innovation.” Lastly, Erickson (2011) notices, cultural learning and innovation take place in different spaces and not just within classrooms.

In the next section, I present some insights and theoretical tools within the field of linguistic anthropology that are relevant to delimit the object of this study, i.e., classroom communications.

**D. Linguistic Anthropology**

As indicated in the introduction, the main theoretical framework of this study falls within linguistic anthropology. Linguistic anthropologists are concerned with the study of “speech use and the relations that exist between language on the one hand and society and culture on the other hand” (Salzmann 2004, 04). Differing from linguistics, which has as its main concern the study of language structure, linguistic anthropologists are also interested in learning how utterances are used in social interactions.

Two reasons make linguistic anthropology a valuable approach to study language use in an alternative classroom. The first reason is, as Stanton Wortham (2008a, 39) argues, that “almost all education is mediated by language.” The second is that the study of a non-traditional type of schooling fulfills anthropologists’ interest to study culture in a diversity of human organizations.

When analyzing language use, linguistic anthropologists, as Wortham clarifies, consider the four aspects of language, which are *form*, *use*, *ideology*, and *domain*. These aspects are intertwined in language
use and cannot be separated because “all language use involves linguistic forms, in use, as construed by ideologies, located within the historical movement of forms and ideologies across events” (Wortham, 2008a, 40). In relation to the study of language use in a classroom, the ideology aspect of language use is especially relevant because schools operate by teaching students tacit and explicit values about “proper” ways of speaking, writing, and behaving in general. Moreover, it is part of this study to understand in which ways the schools’ values about students’ active participation and initiative are reflected in the classroom communications.

Next, I present some linguistic anthropology concepts that serve to delimit the classroom setting as a unit of analysis in this study.

1. Linguistic Anthropology Theoretical Concepts

In this study, classroom talk is analyzed as a speech event (Hymes 1972). Dell Hymes (1972) explains that this concept refers to situations in which the speeches of “participants are controlled by norms and rules” (Duranti 1997, 289). Speech event can be defined in contrast to the more spontaneous communications found in ordinary conversations. The concept is adequate to interpret classroom communication because, as explained before, classroom talk operates with implicit and explicit norms that control interactions among the participants. For example, in a previous section, I mentioned that in traditional classrooms students can participate in classroom talk by three ways: by individual nomination, by invitation to bid, and by invitation to reply. These ways are implicit rules of social interaction that reveal differences between teachers and students in their rights to access the floor. Even though classroom talk is not always constrained by norms, the concept is useful to distinguish moments in which classroom talk switches from being more normative to exhibiting more conversational elements. This concept also allows analyzing how alternative classroom norms of speech vary in relation to traditional classrooms.

The notion of speech community (Gumperz 1968), which can be defined as “the product of the communicative activities engaged in by a given group of people” (Duranti 1997, 82), is employed to

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18 See discussion about the concept of ideology adopted in this study in the Language Ideology section.
define the group of students and teacher analyzed in this study. This definition allows the analysis of alternative-classroom talk as a context-situated activity. Therefore, by using this definition, it is possible to investigate the singularity of language use by the teacher and student participants in an alternative classroom.

This study also presupposes that classroom talk is represented by linguistic variety. This notion assumes that there is linguistic diversity within a larger community, i.e., that naturally there are various styles of speaking within community. This study of language use in an alternative classroom considers the possibility of a diversity of styles of speaking, behaving, and participating within a group of students.

Below, I present the sub-field of linguistic anthropology, language ideology, and discuss the scope of term “ideology” when applied to the study of classroom settings.

2. Language Ideology

Language ideology is a field of inquiry dedicated to analyzing the ideological aspects of language use. Language ideology is, according to Kathyryn A. Woolard (1998), of anthropological importance because it studies the link that mediates “social forms and forms of talk” (03). Language ideology is also concerned with understanding the links between language and identity, aesthetics, morality, and epistemology (Woolard 1998, 03). The study of the ideological aspects of language use can inform us about the nature of humans’ activities and organizations, such as the notions of person, group, and the fundamental institutions of a society such as family, nation-state, and schooling (Woolard 1998, 03). The relevance of the field for the study of classroom talk is fundamental because diverse ways of talking signal affiliation with different socio-cultural groups in society; learning how different groups use and value forms of talking helps to show how these different groups interact.

19 Alessandro Duranti (1997, 70-75) explains that theorists of diverse areas have argued that linguistic homogeneity is an ideological construction that had its origin with the consolidation of European nation-states. With the goal of establishing a national identity, European states elected one dialect as the national language. Duranti (1997) also notes that the term “dialect” has a political connotation because it involved the decision to classify to an ‘inferior’ status a specific variety of a language.
However, as Woolard (1998) points out, the concept of ideology has different meanings and the language ideology inquiry may have “difference emphases” depending on the researcher’s definition. Woolard (1998, 04) explains that the definitions vary from a neutral and broad view of the purpose of language, to ones more focused on the structure and use of language, to others that emphasize the social purposes of language use, also encompassing moral and political interests.20

I have adopted Judith Irvine’s (1989) definition of language ideology to conduct this study. The definition is as follows: “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Woolard 1998, 04).

Irvine’s definition is adequate to analyze education settings because schools can be seen, as Frederic Erickson (1984) explains, an “arena of political negotiation that embodies individuals and group of interests and ideologies,” in which “various kinds of literacy might represent a variety of interests and be embedded in a variety of belief systems” (525). Also, the adoption of this definition of language ideology fulfills a goal of this study, which is to learn how the school’s alternative values system is reflected in the teacher’s and students’ classroom interactions.21

In a literature review on language ideology that covered formal classroom contexts, Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin (1994) conclude that teachers’ “implicit expectations about written language” may lead to “discriminatory judgments about spoken language and student performance” (1994:66). Courtney Cadzen’s research (1988) on “sharing time” activity illustrates Woolard’s and Schieffelin’s conclusion.

20 Kathryn Woolard (1998, 04) provides other definitions of language ideology to illustrate the scope of the field, such as “shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world” (Rumsey 1990); “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1973); and “self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group” (Heath 1989).

21 This definition is also used to consider schools as places invested in “language policies” regulated by a nation-state, the ultimate goal of which is to unify the nation by ensuring that a “standardized dialect” is spoken and written by the entire nation (Philips 2015, 569). In this respect, schools are responsible for valuing and disseminating a national standard language, which is not the only language spoken within the nation. This responsibility creates difficulties for minority students who speak dialects and other languages within a larger community.
Cadzen (1988) explains that “sharing time” is a common activity in early kindergarten and first-grade classrooms with the goal of being an oral preparation for literacy. In this activity, a child is invited to share a personal experience with colleagues and teachers. Cadzen (1988) argues that teachers’ cultural expectations about how students should tell stories can lead to misjudgments about African-American students’ performances. In Cadzen’s words: “In both the California and Boston-area classrooms, the teacher’s lack of comprehension and appreciation was especially marked for the episodic stories told by black children” (1988, 17).

African-American children, Cadzen (1988) reports, often employ episodic narratives to tell their stories, which are complex in terms of structure. This style of narrative, Cadzen explains (1988, 11-12), often employs many temporal markers, shifting in scenes, different themes, many characters, and rising intonation to mark shifts in time. The topic-centered narrative style, according to Cadzen (1988, 12), were often employed by “white middle-class children” and accepted by teachers as a comprehensible format. In comparison to episodic narratives, topic-centered narratives have a simpler structure, which is similar to structures used in written narratives. The topic-centered narrative, Cadzen (1988) points out, is characterized by one single temporal marker, one topic, and the use of rising intonation to mark continuity. Cadzen (1988) argues that teachers’ responses to African-American children’s episodic narratives demonstrate a lack of knowledge about its singular structure. Teachers’ responses, as Cadzen adds (1988), are also based on their expectations on what constitute a theme for an appropriate story.

In the next section, I present the conversation analysis approach, which was the method used to analyze the students’ questions in chapter 5. I also summarize some conversation analysis theoretical assumptions about classroom talk.

3. Conversation Analysis

In this study, Conversation Analysis (on here referred as CA) was used as an important analytical and theoretical approach to analyze the classroom talk. CA, with its focus on talk-in-interaction (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2001), was developed by Harvey Sacks during the 1960s in collaboration with Emanuel
Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. CA aims to “uncover the tacit reasoning procedures and sociolinguistic competences underlying the production and interpretation of talk in organized sequences of interaction” (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2001, 14). By uncovering the procedures and sociolinguistic competences, CA demonstrates how “speakers produce their own behavior and interpret the behavior of others” (Heritage 1984, 241) in diverse types of situations.

Different from other linguistics analyses, CA does not focus on the structure of the language itself, but CA investigates how language is used in social interactions to reach different purposes. As Ian Hutchby and Robin Wooffitt (2002) explains, utterances “are not studied as semantic units, but as products or objects that which are designed and used in terms of activities being negotiated in the talk: as requests, proposals, accusations, complaints and so on” (14). CA also assumes that talk-in-interaction is always related to “the local circumstances in which utterances are produced,” i.e., the relevant circumstances signaled by speakers in their speech (or body behavior) as they orient their actions in relation to each other (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2002, 14).

Paul Drew and John Heritage (1992) argue that CA is a valuable method to be adopted in ethnographic studies of language use because it deeply considers the context of talk, which has been a focus of concern in ethnographic studies in communication. CA’s notion of context is practically achieved because the method focuses on “specific analysis of organization of social actions” and the sequences in which the actions take place (Drew and Heritage 1992, 16). Drew and Heritage (1992) also argue that CA’s inductive method allows analysts to find whether and how participants oriented their actions in relation to the behaviors described in major social variables, such as gender, status, or ethnicity.

**a. CA in Institutional Contexts**

Initially, CA methodology developed to study ordinary conversations. Later, CA expanded to analyze diverse types of institutional talk with the goal of studying “how persons conduct their affairs in institutional contexts” (Drew and Heritage 1992, 05). In relation to institutional contexts, CA theory has
developed by comparing the norms and procedures adopted by speakers in institutional settings with the norms and procedures adopted by speakers in ordinary conversations.

John Heritage (1984, 239-240) explains that, when compared to ordinary conversations, institutional interactions tend to exhibit two related phenomena. The talk in institutional settings, Heritage (1984, 239-240) explains, characteristically displays a “selective reduction” of procedures used in ordinary conversations while adopting higher concentrations of other specific conversational procedures. For example, in classroom talk there is a reduction of the rights of some participants to talk (i.e., to access the floor) at the expense of others; teachers use the floor more often than students because teachers are in charge of delivering the lessons. In ordinary conversations, the rights of taking turns occur in a more democratic way along the conversations. Using classroom talk as an example, teachers’ questions occur at higher concentration than students’ questions. In ordinary conversations, the questions among participants many occur in a fluid and symmetrical way.

Institutional talk has been characterized by displaying asymmetrical interactions between speakers compared to more symmetrical interactions between peers, neighbors, or acquaintances, for example (Heritage 1994, 240). These asymmetries occur, as Drew and Heritage (1992, 23-25) stress, because that nature of institution affects the participants’ actions and, therefore, the verbal behavior of participants. Drew and Heritage (1992) point out that participants orient their conduct to interact with other participants to reach the goals of the institution in question. Also, as Drew and Heritage (1992) explain, institutional participants are constrained to perform specific tasks, and this also affects the nature of the interaction with others. Lastly, Drew and Heritage (1992) add, participants’ inferences about verbal behaviors of other participants are also affected in institutional settings, i.e., what is said by participants in an interaction may have different interpretations depending on hierarchy and the institutional function of the involved participants.

CA research in institutional talk has focused on the following aspects of social interactions: (1) turn-taking organization; (2) overall structural organization; (3) sequence organization; (4) turn design; (5) lexical choice; (6) epistemological and asymmetrical aspects of interaction (Drew and Heritage
In this study, the aspect analyzed in classroom talk is a specific sequence organization of the interaction between the teacher and students that involved a particular way by which some students asked questions. This sequence is known as an *insertion sequence*, and it is further explained in chapter 5.

Heritage and Maynard (2006) explain that sequence organization is considered the “engine room of the organization” by which “context-bound utterances achieve their sense” and interactional or “institutional identities” are “established, maintained, and manipulated” (15-16).

In the next section, I highlight some points about the CA characterization of classroom talk. Note that this characterization refers to an ideal model of classroom talk. CA assumes that there are variations in classroom talk. CA asserts that some features of institutional talk can appear in interactions within ordinary conversations as well (Heritage and Cayman 2010, 35). For example, some aspects of classroom talk, such as use of the IRF sequence, can be found in conversations outside classrooms contexts; the IRF sequence is frequently used in interactions between adults and children outside of classrooms.

### b. Classroom Talk

As mentioned before, teachers have the authority to manage classroom talk. Teachers’ management of talk is particularly exercised by controlling the conversation turn-taking mechanism, which refers to the ways by which speakers take turns to talk. In classroom settings, the management is accomplished by mainly using *pre-allocation rules* (Heritage and Clayman 2010). Heritage and Clayman

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22 Some brief definitions of these terms are as follows: (1) “turn-taking” organization refers to the rules by which different participants access the floor; (2) “overall structural” organization refers to the different activities or phases that an encounter or interaction passes through; (3) “sequence organization” refers to a series of sequences of speakers’ verbal (or non-verbal) actions that are linked to one another; (4) “turn design” refers to the analysis of specific actions and the choices of verbal constructions used in participants’ utterance(s); (5) “lexical choice” refers to the analysis of words used by participants in their utterances; (6) “epistemological aspects of the interaction” refer to the analysis of some pattern of participants’ conduct that occur in response to their knowledge, profession, and hierarchical position in an institutional encounter; and “asymmetrical aspects of the interaction” refer to the study of ways by which different participants are socially differentiated through the interactions (Heritage and Clayman 2010; Drew and Heritage 1992; Heritage and Maynard 2006).

23 In the linguistic anthropology section, I adopted the concept of *speech event* to characterize classroom communications. CA characterization of classroom talk is consistent with this concept.
(2010) explain that the system of pre-allocation “involves the restriction of one party to asking questions and the other to responding them” (37). For example, in traditional classrooms, students are mainly called to participate in the talk to answer teacher’s questions. To do so, as mentioned early in this chapter, students may have to follow one of these procedures, to bid, to volunteer, or to be nominated by the teacher. Therefore, these rules determine when specific participants may speak and what kind of verbal contributions they can make.

Thus, teachers have the institutional role of posing questions of students while students have the main role of answering those questions. The nature of teachers’ questions is also peculiar. Teachers pose known-information questions, which are questions in which the questioner knows the answers. These questions serve to examine “the knowledge of the respondent” (Mehan 1979b, 285-295). This type of teachers’ questions contrasts with information-seeking question, which are questions in which questioner do not know the information being sought and assumes that the respondent may know the answer (Mehan 1979b, 289). It is possible to differentiate the known-information questions from information-seeking questions because the first type of question generates a sequence that will contain a teacher’s feedback on the student’s answer. Even though in classrooms teachers employ to a higher degree the first type of question, the information-seeking type is also employed by teachers. When compared to the spontaneous nature of ordinary conversations, the repetitive acts of posing questions that the questioner already knows the answer to, then following with an evaluation act, would be considered an awkward behavior; in ordinary conversations, displaying such behaviors would promote disaffiliation among speakers.

The teacher’s role of asking questions is a source of asymmetry between teacher and students in terms of opportunities to raise topics or seek developments in previous comments. The teachers’ role of asking questions places students in a position of being led into a discussion. By using the notion of an adjacency pair, the Question–Answer adjacency pair, CA explains how this asymmetry is maintained in classrooms.

Adjacency pairs are actions that occur together in conversation in a way that one speaker’s action requires a specific speaker’s response, such as questions and answer, greetings, farewells, and offers and
acceptances (or rejections). We termed the first action of an adjacency pair a “first pair part” and the second action a “second pair part” (Duranti 1997, 250). In case of a sequence of interaction with multiple adjacency pairs, we order the pairs by naming them as first adjacency pair, second adjacency pair, and so on.

In a question-answer (Q-A) adjacency pair, the projection of the first speaker’s action creates an expectation that it should be addressed in the other speaker’s turn. For example, a question creates an expectation of receiving an answer. CA asserts that this expectation is noticed when a questioner does not get an answer from the recipient. CA theory refers to this expectation as conditional relevance (Heritage 1984, 249). Therefore, there is a restriction on what the second speaker can do in the second pair part in terms of actions (Heritage 1984, 245). Thus, in the case of the teacher’s questions, students have less ability to raise questions or change subjects because the second pair part of this type of adjacency pair requires an answer to the teachers’ question. As Drew and Heritage (1992) argue, the question-answer pattern of interaction gives “institutional incumbents,” the teachers, the capacity to direct the talk by changing topics in their “next questions” (49).

Another remarkable asymmetry in formal classroom talk is the institutional role of the teacher as evaluator of students’ answers. Teachers have the power to evaluate answers because they supposedly know the information being sought and can judge the relevance of an answer in relation to the ways that they aim to develop a topic (Wardhaugh 2002, 304). On the other hand, students are unlikely to evaluate the teacher’s comments or responses because of the teacher’s institutional authority.

Teachers are also in a position to correct students’ answers. CA also explored this feature of classrooms by comparing it to ordinary conversations. From CA’s point of view, corrections are one type

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24 This restriction also helps to maintain an inertia in the use of a series of Q-A sequences by teachers; teachers are often the ones asking the questions and the students are often the ones answering them (and not the inverse).

25 Note that, in classroom talk, the IRF sequence is an adjacency pair, which is followed by a feedback act by the teacher after a student provides the second pair part.
of repair. The concept of repair refers to attempts of speakers to fix miscommunication in conversations. Ian Hutchby and Robin Wooffitt (2002) define repair as following:

“a generic term which is used in CA to cover a wide range of phenomena, from seeming errors in turn-taking such as those involved in much overlapping talk, to any of the forms of what we commonly would call ‘correction’ – that is, substantive faults in the contents of what someone has said” (57).

I will here on refer to this range of phenomena as a “trouble.” In ordinary conversations, speakers prefer to adopt self-initiated repair to correct troubles in communications (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2002, 66). This means that, when there is a trouble in communications, the speaker who is the source of trouble is the preferred agent to correct the trouble. An, less preferred option, often employed ordinary conversations, is the other-initiated repair. Other-initiated repair defines situations in which the recipient initiates an action indicating to the speaker, whose talk is found to contain the source of the trouble, that something was not clear (or was wrong) in the speaker’s previous turn. Thus, the preference is normally to let the speaker fix the trouble (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2002, 61).

However, related to classroom talk, A W. McHoul (1990) demonstrates that the system of preference of repairs is skewed towards other-repair, initiated or conducted by a teacher. McHoul’s analysis of a formal classroom talk demonstrated that the teacher used two strategies to repair students’ troubles. Note that troubles, in classroom contexts, often include general mistakes or wrong answers that are made by students and that can be repaired by a teacher. McHoul (1990) found that the frequent strategy employed by the teacher to “correct students” is the other-initiated self-repair. In this case, the teacher did not perform any corrections but instead gave students clues and let students self-correct. According to McHoul (1990), a less frequent, but still used, strategy adopted by the teacher is the other-initiated other-repair. In this case, the teacher initiated and executed corrections of a student’s trouble.

Note that in a CA analysis of conversation, trouble is defined by the parties involved. The analyst must be attentive to what the parties considered “trouble” during a conversation. For example, a speaker’s non-grammatically correct utterance may not be treated as a “trouble” by one of the parties, or a speaker’s perfect grammatical utterance may be treated as a “trouble” by a hearer.
McHoul (1990) also demonstrates that students may perform self-repair, but they do not repair the teacher’s troubles, i.e., students do neither other-initiated repair or other-initiated other repair.

In this section, I presented the CA characterization of classroom talk in terms of asymmetries between teacher and students. The asymmetries involve restrictions of actions from the part of students, such as how often students can ask questions or initiate an interaction with the teacher. Teachers, on the other hand, are entitled to ask questions any time, request answers, and decide who can talk or provide an answer. This characterization serves as a reference to analyze the classroom talk in an alternative school.

Chapter 3: Methodology

A. The Study

Below, I summarize the methodology adopted to pursue the follow research question: How do communicative practices in an alternative school classroom reflect the democratic and progressive school's values of children's active participation and children's initiate courses of action? The study adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach to study the communicative practices in an alternative classroom.27

The study was conducted in a public school in the United States. This research began only after authorizations of the Hunter College IRB, the City School District, the school being studied, and voluntary participation of group students, two teachers, and two staff members. The research data collection occurred between November 4, 2016, and December 21, 2016.

The study’s ethnographic record consists of the following materials:

1. Word files with fieldnotes from participant observation in the classrooms and in common areas in the school;
2. Audio recordings of communications of two classes and their respective transcripts (a total of 18 audio recordings of classroom sessions);

27 The collection of data was done in two classrooms. However, a final conversation analysis was conducted only in one classroom (see justification below).
3. Audio recordings of two semi-structured interviews with two teachers and their respective transcripts (a total of four interviews);  
4. Audio recordings of semi-structured interviews conducted with two staff members and their respective transcriptions (a total of two interviews);  
5. Electronic documents and hard copy materials related to the school curriculum obtained in the school, syllabi of the classes, and the content of lessons that were provided to students by their teachers.

1. Participants

The participating teachers were selected based on their voluntary agreement and on their experience implementing the school’s model of education. The criteria were based on teachers’ self-assessment as experienced teachers and on at least three years of teaching at the school. Two teachers participated in the study. To protect participants’ identity, I refer to them as teacher A and teacher B. 

Teacher A participated in this study with a science class, which focused on Geology (classroom A). The class had a duration of 45 minutes. Classroom A was mainly composed of ninth graders and had a total of 22 students. The age range of the students was between 14 and 16 years old. Seven students participated in the study in classroom A. The age range of the participating students was between 14 and 16 years old. Five participating students were female and 2 were male.

Teacher B participated with a social studies class focused on Latin American studies (classroom B). The class also covered the English curriculum. This class had a duration of two periods of 45 minutes with an interval of five minutes between them. Teacher B had two teacher aides and 22 students in her classroom. The age range of the students was between 14 and 15 years old. All students in Classroom B were ninth graders. Nine students participated in the study in classroom B. The age range of the participating students was between 14 and 15 years old. The group of participating students in classroom B included one African-American student. Five participating students were female and four were male.
Between the two classes, 13 students participate in the study. There was an overlap of five participating students between the two classes. However, only three overlapped participating students consented to participate in both classes. In this way, the comparison of the participating students’ ways of interacting in the two classroom classrooms (A and B) was restricted to three students.\textsuperscript{28} To protect participating students’ identity, I refer to them as student #1, #2, #3, #4, . . . . The selection of students was based on their voluntary agreement to participate in the study and on their parental consent.

Two other staff members who participated in the study were the school principal and a staff member who oversees the curriculum (on here, they are respectively referred to as the principal and staff member). The selection of the staff members was made based on their voluntary agreement and on their knowledge about the school curriculum and history.

2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

a. Participant Observation in the School

Participant observation in the school comprised a total of approximately 65 hours. This participant observation data collection occurred during the period of between November 4, 2016, and December 21, 2016. These hours did not include participant observations conducted in the two classrooms.\textsuperscript{29} This instrument of data collection served to obtain more information about the school practices and the school model of education.

Typically, the participant observation data was collected on the days of my visits to audio record and observe the participating teachers’ classroom sessions. I collected information during specific times, such as during recesses, recreational time, events, “all school meetings,” or right before and after classroom sessions in the school. During these times, I spent time in the school’s common spaces, such as the cafeteria, gymnasium, students’ lounge, library, and hallways. Occasionally, I had brief and informal.

\textsuperscript{28} This lower number of overlapped participating students did not allow a solid analysis of students’ participation in both classes.

\textsuperscript{29} The breakdown of the overall participant observation in this study is as follows: participant observation in school areas (65 hours); participant observation in classroom A (5 hours and 43 minutes); and participant observation in classroom B (8 hours and 59 minutes).
interactions with adult participants with the goal of learning more about the school’s activities, curriculum, and history. The information collected from participant observation in the school was used to contextualize the classroom communication within the large school context. Notes from participant observation in the school were written in the same day, usually in the school, often in the school library or in the school cafeteria after recesses. Expanded notes were created in Word-file documents, in which detailed descriptions of my observations were developed. The expanded notes were usually created one day or few days after the written notes were taken. Sometimes, I wrote my observations at home, after a whole day of participant observation in the school. In these situations, notes were created directly in a Word file and contained detailed information of the observations.

The participant observation notes were analyzed by separating the information under themes such as school values, the school meetings, school structures, and students’ participation, among others. The organized information was copied into a Word-file document. I used this information during the analysis of the school curriculum with the goal of describing the context of the school and situating the classroom communications.

b. Participant Observation in the Classrooms

During classroom audio recordings, I adopted a non-intrusive participant observation approach. In other words, I did not participate in any discussions, activities, explanations, talks, teaching, evaluations, or decisions during the lessons or activities. This approach was adopted because the goal of the analysis was to register the communicative practices in the classroom in the most naturalist way possible despite my presence. This approach also ensured that the normal functioning of the classroom sessions and instructional time were not interrupted by my presence. During the classes, I wrote notes about my observations, such as non-verbal behaviors of the participants, disposition of instructional material, the disposition of furniture and physical space, disposition of individuals in the classroom, the number of students present in the classroom, and which participant was talking at certain moment. This
participant observation data was used to understand how the school’s model of education reflected in classroom communications and to contextualize the analysis of classroom communications.

The participant observation notes were mainly accessed when I transcribed the audio recording of classroom sessions and was interpreting the participants’ utterances within the sequence of interactions in the classrooms. These notes were also used to describe the classroom’s activities, classroom space, and students’ participation. These notes were organized under themes. Then, the notes were copied into a Word-file document.

c. The Researcher

Because of my training in Anthropology, I am aware that I am an instrument of data collection. Therefore, I am conscious that the participant observation notes passed through my lens of analysis about what was relevant or not to be recorded during the fieldwork in the school. Because of that, often, during this study, I self-reflected about the relevance of my observations and the reasons to pursue some themes more than others. Moreover, my esteem for the participants in the study and for their work in the school was also a constant subject of my reflection. This was done in a way by which, when I was writing my notes, I oriented myself to the ideal of scientific objectivity, even though, as a social scientist, I am aware that this ideal never exists. This study is firmly grounded on the audio-recorded data. The audio recorded data and the inductive analysis in this study supported a more complex description and account of the classroom interactions, which were the main focus of this study.

d. Audio-Recordings of the Classroom Communications

To audio record the individual talk of the participating teachers’ and participating students, I used an audio-recorder device in the observed classrooms. The audio recorder was turned off when a non-participant student was identified speaking individually in the classroom. Therefore, some sequences of interaction involving participant speakers were not fully recorded.
i. Teacher A’s Audio-recorded Classes

I audio-recorded (and observed) teacher A’s class (Classroom A) nine times, totaling approximately five hours and 43 minutes. The data collection referent to this class occurred during the period between November 8, 2016, and December 20, 2016.

After transcribing the classroom A audio recordings and analyzing participating students’ initiations, my advisor and I decided not to pursue a CA analysis of the communications in classroom A. Few students in classroom A participated in the present study, which, combined with the poor sound quality of the audio recordings, were the reasons for our decision. The audio recording data of classroom A contained many inaudible passages mainly due the disposition of tables in the room. The students were distributed among five separated large, tables that were placed at different angles in a way that many of participating students were located away from the audio recorder. The teacher very often walked throughout the classroom while talking, many times moving away from the audio recording. Therefore, very often, participating students’ and the teacher’s voices were not well captured in the recordings. The register of participants’ voices was more problematic when participating students spoke in a lower tone and/or a conversation near the audio recorder overlapped with their talk. This set of factors led to many empty parentheses in the transcriptions of the classroom sessions and uncertainty about what was being said by the participating students and the teacher. The poor quality of the audio recordings reduced significantly the quantity of data that a solid conversation analysis of students’ questions would require.

ii. Teacher B’s Audio Recorded Classes

I observed and audio-recorded teacher B’s class (Classroom B) nine times, totaling approximately eight hours and 59 minutes. The data collection of classroom sessions occurred during the period of between November 10, 2016, and December 21, 2016. The audio-recordings of classroom communications containing participants’ talk were transcribed. The sound quality of the audio recordings of classroom B was superior to the sound quality of the audio recordings in classroom A. Thus, the communications of the classroom B audio recordings were the focus of this study’s CA-based analysis.
The transcription of classroom communications (both, classrooms A and B) followed an orthographic format, i.e., prosodic features such as variation in terms of pronunciation of words, word intonation, or small pauses within the talk of each participant speaker were not transcribed in the first transcriptions of the classroom communications. This strategy accelerated the process of transcribing the audio recordings. Then, an initial coding was applied in these transcripts with the intent to identify students’ initiations during classroom talk (see more about the methodology used to identify the students’ initiation in chapter 5). However, a more detailed transcription was employed in the excerpts representing the interactions between the teacher and participating students. The transcription notations adopted in this study are drawn from CA format, following a simplified format. Most symbols adopted in the transcripts in this study are those proposed by Gail Jefferson (2004), with an addition of a few other symbols (see appendix B for an explanation of the transcription symbols adopted in this study).

e. Audio-Recorded Interviews with the Adult Participants

The data from adult participants’ interviews was used to contextualize utterances and interactions of participants in the conversation analysis of classroom B communications and to understand the school’s practices, history, curriculum, ideology, and approach to progressive education.

Both teachers participated in two audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, in which they provided information about the school’s model of education, about the activities and the curriculum of their classes, and about other structures or activities developed in the school. The first interview with each participant took place at the beginning of the research and the second after the data collection in the classes had ended. The first interviews explored some general themes referent to the curriculum, their classes, and school practices; the second interviews were used to fill gaps in knowledge about some processes that linked the school curriculum and the classroom practices.

30 Participating students were not interviewed in this study; to build trust with children would require fieldwork beyond the scope of this master’s thesis.
The principal of the school and the staff member participated in one audio-recorded semi-structured interview, in which they provided information about the school history, curriculum, activities, mission, and philosophy. The interview with the principal occurred at the beginning of the study, and the interview with the staff member at the end of the data collection.

All interviews were fully transcribed following an orthographic format. Then, the information provided by the interviewees was organized under themes related to the school’s values, history, curriculum, structures, and processes. The information provided by participating adults under each theme was compared and used to help to understand how the school’s model of education, values, mission, history, curriculum, and classroom practices were related to and could explain students’ classroom participation. The interviews, together with the school documents, also helped in the description of the school context, which is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: The School Context

A. The School

The goal of this chapter is to situate the classroom communications within the curriculum and belief system of the school. Thus, in this chapter, I respond to the first part of the research question regarding the school’s system of values and its ideology. This chapter describes the school in the ways in which it was presented and discussed by participants in the interviews and in some school documents. I also included some of my observations of the school that were useful for a more complete description of the school and its practices.

In relation to school documents, I rely extensively on a school document (on here referred to as a school document) that lays out the school history, curriculum, mission, system of beliefs, structures, rules, and norms. This document also includes a calendar and a planner, which can be used by teachers, students, and staff. At the beginning of each academic year, all students receive this document. So, in this document students can access the school information.
This school is located in a progressive university town. The school has been a public alternative school since its inception. It was founded in 1974 with a junior high school program and expanded along the years to incorporate other grades. At the time of the study, the school enrolled about 300 students attending the grades 6-12. According to the staff member, nowadays the school receives a variety of students, such as students from a “political-pedagogic progressive community of the town”; students who were failing in other local middle schools; students with emotional needs; and other students who had problems with mainstream schools because of bullying and other social/political reasons. The staff member also reports that the ethnic diversity of students is small and that many of African-American students enrolled in the school belong to middle-class white families, which include students of color “through adoption or foster care.”

**B. The School Curriculum**

The school curriculum differentiates from the curriculum of many other public schools in various aspects. The school adopts the outcome-based system, which has been used by some alternative public schools as an alternative to the credit system. In contrast to credit system, in which classes are structured to cover a broader number of topics in each grade, the outcome-based system is organized to teach mainly fundamental skills and knowledge that students must demonstrate in each subject area. The outcome-based system, according to the staff member, is better suited for the in-depth learning approach adopted in the school and allows teachers to choose content and materials for their classes.

The outcome-based system also allows the school to use another method of student evaluation. Instead of adopting grades to evaluate students, the teachers use written evaluations that assess student performance. The written evaluations consider a set of outcomes that students have to demonstrate in each course level in a specific area of knowledge. According to the principal, in this system students rarely fail a class. Succeeding in classes is possible because most courses are structured in a way in which students

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31 As the staff member reported, many students have parents who are affiliated with a local university.
work towards a completion of a “portfolio” that can be accomplished by attending different classes.\textsuperscript{32} Commonly, students move to the next level of a course only after completing the portfolio for that course level, as the principal pointed out. The teachers’ written evaluations are based on a selection of a student’s academic works that best demonstrates the student’s skills. The selection of the student’s academic works is then placed into the student’s portfolio.

Some areas of knowledge, such as Mathematics, Sciences, English, and Social Studies, are structured to lead to specific outcomes that are defined in a document termed PBAT (Performance Based Assessment), which is a rubric compiled for these areas of knowledge. PBATs are a state alternative of assessing students’ progress in the school; these rubrics are a product of an agreement between public alternative schools and the Board of Regents. PBATs replace the state standardize tests, except for the English curriculum.\textsuperscript{33}

The school curriculum is divided into ten essential areas; seven of them comprise the Core Curriculum. These seven essentials encompass the following areas: (1) Community and Leadership; (2) English and Global Languages; (3) Mathematics; (4) Arts; (5) Social Studies; (6) Science; (7) and Physical Education and Health. The key area of “Community and Leadership,” also referred to as “Participants and Leaders in the Community,” is of special analytical interest to be described in this overview because this essential seeks to develop students’ active participation and initiative skills in the school and in the community.

To complete this area, students are required to, for example, “work and live cooperatively with others” by participating in some structures of the school and activities promoted by the school, such as

\textsuperscript{32} A portfolio is a set of works that represents the student’s success in a course level in a given area of knowledge. At the time of this study, the school was implementing a digital-portfolio system. As the adult participants reported, this system would enable the school to store the student’s selected works within a portfolio. The digital-portfolio system, according to teacher B, will help to solve the storage problem of students’ academic works and help to assess interdisciplinary outcomes. The staff member also points out that the digital-system portfolio will help the outcome-based system to have more accountability and be more objective in terms of outcome assessment.

\textsuperscript{33} Thus, students enrolled in this school are required to take only the state-English exam at end of the school career. The principal considers that the state-English exam is not a content-driven exam, and therefore it is aligned with the curriculum and the in-depth approach of teaching at the school.
Family Groups, All School Meetings, Committees, and trips (see explanation of these structures in this chapter). Other requirements include, for example, the development of work on an issue of bias under supervision of a mentor, and the learning of conflict resolution skills in one of the school structures that mediates or resolve situations of conflict, such as the Alternative Community Court (an internal court system composed by students and adults).

**C. The School’s System of Beliefs**

The school document lists a set of the school beliefs and ideals termed “the statements of beliefs.” The list contains nine statements (School document 2016-17, 54-55). The statements were created by a group of students, staff, and parents in 1987 and later revised in 1995-96. Below, I refer to some of the statements that closely reflect the progressive values discussed in section B, in chapter 1:

- “We believe in the importance of each individual student.” [Child-centered approach]
- “We believe in providing for the needs of a diverse population of students, and students of abilities.” [Child-centered approach]
- “We believe in encouraging students to use freedom responsibly, and to make educational choices appropriate to their individual levels of development.” [Children’s involvement in the learning decisions]
- “We believe the effective and creative aspects of learning are as valuable as objective and conceptual learning.” [Educating the whole child]
- “We believe we have a responsibility to promote a broader world view and a positive change by the way we design our curriculum and prepare our students for learning throughout their lives.” [The school’s role to prepare students to change society]

The democratic orientation of the school is not explicitly mentioned in the statement of beliefs. However, this orientation can also be seen as a school value since the school creates structures and

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34 The school’s system of values is also observed by the educators and scholars who have inspired the staff over the years. The school displays the portraits of these educators and scholars on one of its walls. Some of these educators and scholars are as follows: Paulo Freire; John Dewey; Septima Clark; Jonathan Kazol; and Margaret Mead. Note that John Dewey is a known progressive educator.

35 A complete list of the school’s beliefs can be found in Appendix A.

36 All bracketed comments in this list are mine.
processes for students to actively and democratically participate in the school. Below, I describe the school structures and processes based on the adult participants’ explanations and on the school document.

As the school principal poses, the main characteristic that differentiates this school from other traditional schools is the school’s democratic orientation. The principal explained that three basic structures in the school make the school democratic: all school meetings (ASM), the committees, and the family groups. The principal also commented that classrooms may also have some democratic orientation, depending on the ability of teacher and the subject. Thus, as she points out, students may give their opinions about how a class is run and even suggest topics to be explored in class. 37 Below, I describe these school structures.

**D. The School Structures**

**1. All School Meetings**

The most evident structure of the school that reveals its democratic orientation is the All School Meetings (ASM), which is also the central piece of the school, according to the principal. ASM is a part of school government that has the power to change the school. This branch of government is where students can exert their interests since the students make up most of the group. The school document mentions that the ASM is a version of direct democracy (2016-17, 76). This means that every individual, student or staff member, holds an equal voting right at the ASM. In these meetings, the school meets to discuss and decide on diverse proposals that will affect the school. Proposals can be submitted by anyone in the school, including students. The ASM meets weekly in the school gymnasium and is led by a group of 15 and 16 year-old students who are part of a specific school committee. 38 These students coordinate

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37 Classes may be multi-grade because in some phases of the high-school career students can take classes in a different order to fulfill the different portfolio requirements.

38 During participant observation in the school, I noticed a board in the school dedicated to explaining the procedures to submit a proposal. In this board, one could find proposal forms and a drop-off for a proposal envelope. I also observed these meetings several times and noticed that staff members do not run the meetings, even though they are present at the meetings and often participated in discussions and voting.
the presentation, discussion, and voting on proposals to all at the school (about 350 people, including adults). Participation in the ASM is obligatory for all students.

2. Committees

The “committees” is a second democratic structure of the school. By participating in the committees, students help adults to run the school. This is another way in which this school is different from traditional schools, according to the principal. Committees meet twice a week to develop their activities. The school can have between 18 to 20 committees. They are formed by a group of students and couple of adults. The principal pointed out that students can learn and develop leadership skills by participating in these committees. She clarified that committee work is led by the students, with the orientation of adults. In some of these committees, students assume the role of co-leaders, she added.

There are two types of committees. One type conducts more practical work in the school, and the other conducts activities to educate the school on a series of different issues. Practical committees are, for example, the committee that plans and runs the ASMs; the committee that runs the newspaper; and the committee that supports a school project that provides a healthy alternative lunch every day and that helps to clean the cafeteria after lunch. The committees with more educative purposes are, for example, the committee that creates activities in the school and community to promote feminism; the committee that creates a space for gender and sexual minorities in the school; the committee that plans activities that support activism for students of color; and the committee that mediates conflicts and incidents in the school. Many of these educative committees address issues of bias that may affect the school, including bullying, according to the principal.

In their interviews, both participating teachers commented that, by being involved with the students in these committees, they (teachers) develop a closer understanding of and relationship with the students. For example, in the second interview, teacher A posed that, because teachers and students work

39 During the participant observation in the school, I observed several times students and a couple adults helping to clean the cafeteria after lunch. I learned from the principal that this task of cleaning the cafeteria is shared between a specific committee and the family groups throughout the weekdays (see discussion on family groups below).
together conducting these committee activities (also family group activities) students, can see her as a common person. As she puts it:

“But, one of the things that I think is really huge is that we do it together. And so, the relationship that I get to have with my students is not just my classroom experience. And that is huge because they see me differently. You know, they value me differently because of it . . . . Our kids know we are people, you know. And so, that is a different footing that we have in our conversations with them. When we are disappointed with them; or when we are exciting for them; when we are struggling with an idea with them.”

3. Family Groups and “Habits of a Self-Directed Learner”

The third democratic structure of the school, the principal pointed out, are the family groups. She added that the family group structure also makes the school different from many other schools. The school may have 18 to 20 family groups. Each group has a leader and a co-leader and is composed of about 13 to 15 students, and every student in the school belongs to a family group. The groups meet twice a week. Teacher B, who attended the school herself, considered that the family group structure is one of the school structures that helps a student have a place in the larger structure of the school.

There are two types of family groups, as teacher A explained. One type has a practical purpose. In this case, students and adults would meet around an interest or activity, such as a bicycle trip, rock climbing trip, or a community service project in the local area. The other type, a regular family group, is not organized to pursue a specific activity or interest. The principal added that family groups also perform some small amount of service in the school. Twice a week, for example, one of the school’s family groups helps to clean the cafeteria.

The school document lists ten functions of family groups (2016-17, 58-59). Some of them are as follows: providing counseling, academic and monitoring; establishing communication between the school and the student’s home; helping to build the sense of community; offering a place for students to learn and develop organization and leadership skills and participate in decision-making processes; offering a space for students to create recreational activities by developing, planning, and organizing the activities; and serving as the first place of conflict mediation.
According to the adult participants, inside family groups each student develops a plan, with the orientation of the family-group adults, to develop some non-cognitive skills, referred in the school curriculum as *habits of a self-directed learner*. Even though each student will develop a plan to develop one or a few habits every year, the school document mentions that students are also placed in situations throughout the curriculum in which they can learn these habits (2016-17, 89). The school document also displays a list of *habits of a self-directed learner* (2016-17, 89). These habits are as follows:

- **Organization:** “Come prepared; follow directions; plan and prioritize your work; break down assignments into doable chunks; keep track of responsibilities; have a time and place to do homework.”

- **Awareness:** “Express anger and frustration appropriately; be aware of anxiousness and how to calm yourself; be open to feedback and be able to make changes; and be aware of and appreciate your successes.”

- **Respect:** “Respect others; respect the environment of the school; respect [the school]’s rules and expectations; use peaceful means to solve conflicts; and be open minded to the ideas of others.”

- **Initiative:** “Ask questions; participate; get to school and classes on time; do work without reminders from adults; seek out the help you need; take risks as a learner; and speak up for yourself and for others.”

- **Perseverance:** “Stick with something until it is finished; complete work on time; take school attendance seriously; stay focused and pay attention; recognize obstacles and solve problems; and be motivated to do your best.”

Among the habits, the “initiative” habit is the category that is closely related to the progressive value of children’s active participation and initiative. Note that “initiative” is described in the school document with examples of actions that students should display in the school, such as “ask questions,” “participate,” “take a risk as a learner,” and “speak up for yourself and for others.” Therefore, these actions are valued in the school and classroom. Note that “asking questions” is one of the actions that a self-directed learner is allowed to display.

Next, I briefly describe the school process created in the curriculum to promote students’ learning of habits and what the participating teachers mentioned about the importance of the students’ learning of these habits. I also bring out some of the participating teachers’ perspectives and comments about students’ questions in the classroom and about students’ participation in their classrooms.
E. School Processes to Promote Students’ Learning of “Habits”

As mentioned by the adult participants, one of the school mechanisms to incite the learning of the habits begins inside the family groups. Every year, students are asked to reflect on their individual strengths and challenges and then fill out an inventory of habits. Each student is asked to make up one or a couple of goals for developing some habits. According to the school document, students are also called upon to reflect on their progress of reaching their goals inside their family groups, in their class self-evaluations, and in the mid-year conference (2016-17, 89).

The participating teachers and the staff member explained that the family group leaders, in a more informal and supportive and informal way, can help students to reflect on the process of reaching student’s goals along the year. The staff member also pointed out that students also have the support of the whole school to “think, reflect, and reach their goals.”

In two written self-evaluations during the year, students formally reflect on the goals. This self-evaluation process is done in each class that a student attended during the year: one at the end of the second cycle (mid-term) and the other at the end of the year. In these self-evaluations, students are called upon to reflect on their process of reaching the goals and how the process of learning some habits may have influenced their class performance.

In the mid-term conferences, each student reads these self-evaluations with his or her family group leader, and then the family group leader reads all the teachers’ evaluations of that student. At the end of the year, a similar procedure is done, but in the presence of each student’s parents (or caregivers).

The teachers also evaluate the students’ habits skills. However, the teachers write this evaluation separately from the hard skills and knowledge evaluation, as the staff member pointed out. The teachers’ evaluation of the students’ habits is conducted in a way that the graduation of students from high school is dependent only on knowledge and hard skills that students possess, as the staff member clarified. However, students receive feedback about the habits and about the students’ efforts towards following expectations, which are also related to the habits because expectations reflect classes’ rules of conduct.
The staff member stressed that a student’s graduation is only dependent on students’ skills and knowledge.

In the teachers’ annual evaluations of students, there are two separate sections to evaluate the hard skills and the habits. The separation, as the staff member points out, is to help teachers to have in mind what students need to develop, in terms of habits, from the skills and knowledge that students possess. The skills and knowledge should count for a student’s graduation. The school document also refers to this separation between students’ habits and their skills and knowledge in the teacher’s evaluation form and stresses that “the bottom line for high school graduation is each student’s successful portfolio demonstrations in the 10 essential areas” (2016-17, 87).

F. Success in the School and “the Habits”

Regarding the habits, the school document (2017, 89) mentions that “success in school and life is often a reflection of each student’s academic and personal habits.” In the interviews, the participating teachers and the staff member commented that the habits are important skills for helping students to be successful. To understand what a successful student is, I asked each teacher to explain the term “successful student.”

In the second interview, teacher B told me that success is measured individually in the school and that at their graduation she sees how each student’s process culminated in his or her graduation. She explained that, at the beginning of high school, students who struggle to demonstrate the skills and knowledge required in a class will have other opportunities to demonstrate those skills and knowledge in other course levels. Teacher B adds that the demonstration of skills and knowledge is related to the students’ acquisition of habits or the students’ possession of them. In her own words:

“I think that where I see that happening in the school is by the time that [they] graduate. So, they can totally blow my class, ninth grade. . . . I try to design my courses so that they kind of spiraling on the same skills. So, if they blow one time, they can re-demonstrate another time. . . . So, they may have a feeling of having messed up or not passed the class, but they still got everything that they got. And they can have applied that to the next time that [they] can demonstrate the skill. So, some of that is habits, attitude, the perseverance for just sticking with it, and getting older,
developing those skills on their own time, respect for process, awareness of themselves as a learner.”

Later in the same interview, teacher B explained that some students are able to demonstrate the skills and knowledge required in the classes, even though these students may not have developed some important habits, such as in turning the assignment on time. Thus, a student’s lack of some habits, which includes inadequate academic behaviors, such as turning in homework late or coming late to the classes, may not necessarily impede the student’s academic progress in the school.

The staff member similarly explained the evaluation system. He pointed out that teachers’ ability to evaluate students’ knowledge and skills separately from students’ habits is possible because of the school’s outcome system. As the staff member puts it:

“In this system [if] a student came not turning [in] the homework for any other reasons, but if they can demonstrate each one of those outcomes, they may be ready to move on. So, it shifts the emphasis from getting your work done, coming on time, although, we want them getting all the work done and coming on time. But the ultimate demonstration whether they ready to graduate or not, it’s they have shown if they have skills and knowledge in each of these areas. So, that is a fundamental difference between our curriculum, approach to the curriculum, and almost every other school.”

This separation makes the school unique in terms of assessing students’ behavior and academic knowledge. As discussed in chapter 2, at least regarding students’ participation in classroom talk, these two spheres of the students’ performances are normally melted together. For example, the competent participation concept (Mehan 1979) discussed how students are evaluated not only in terms of academic knowledge but also in terms of adequacy of the interactional forms by which students provide their knowledge.

G. “Asking Questions” Skill and Participation in Classroom Talk

As discussed early in this chapter, one of the habits, the initiative habit, is closely related to active participation in the classroom talk because of one the actions described under the initiative is the ability to ask questions and to participate in classrooms and other structures of the school.
In the second interview, teacher B did not mention the initiative habit as the most important habit for students for being successful in her class: she mentioned the perseverance habit instead. She explained that perseverance is a very important skill because of the nature of her curriculum. Teacher B also added that she likes diligent students who may not be good writers but who at lunch ask her for help with their writing. In her own words:

“Because I am thinking about in terms of literacy and reading. . . . And, this is a common core thing. Also, just going a few steps out of your comfort zone and figuring out ways of access that, those ideas involve perseverance, and also perseverance for ( ) with writing. The ones, the students that are really exciting to me, are ones who don’t come as good writers, but really come at lunch.”

Teacher B also commented on students’ questions in the classroom. In the second interview, teacher B described her academic relationships with students. She explained her efforts to promote a dialogue among students and to have students ask questions about the material instead of asking all the questions herself:

“So, the relationship is respectful. And probing, I like to ask at least an extra question, to clarify or dig a little deeper [when] someone talks. So, I’m trying to get students to ask more questions from each other, but also ask more questions about the materials ( ) rather than me asking all the questions. So, I think that it’s a lot modeling, practicing. I preach respecting and dialogue.”

In my second interview with teacher A, she mentioned that perseverance is a very important skill to for a student to succeed in her class. But, she clarified that this skill is difficult to develop by students who lack it. Teacher A explained that teachers can try to model this skill in classroom, but it is difficult to change students’ preconceptions about their abilities when they are deeply convinced about them. In teacher A’s own words:

“So, you know, if a kid comes with no perseverance, it’s hard to find that switch. It’s hard to be on that outside of a kid who is convinced that they can’t whatever is. So, I would say that is the really the most challenging. We’ve talked about how do you teach perseverance. We can model it. You can recognize it and reward it. And, that it seems to be a very successful thing to do, but it’s really hard to get in, to a kid who is convinced that they can’t for whatever reason.”

However, teacher A considered that “asking questions” is the most important skill for the students to be successful in her Geology class. In the two interviews, teacher A spoke about the strategies that she
designed in her curriculum to teach students to improve their ability to ask fundamental questions. One of these strategies is conducted with each student through their written work, and the other is conducted collectively after her lectures, and to be explored during classroom discussions. I observed teacher A conducting the second strategy in two of her lessons. On one of the occasions, teacher A wrote on the board all students’ questions posed about the content. In the following class, she addressed and discussed all students’ questions posed in the anterior class.

In relation to teacher A’s remarks on the importance of asking questions, she commented that the school’s alumni have reported that they have seen their ability to ask questions as an element of differentiation between them and their new friends in college coming from other schools. As she puts it:

“I think that ‘asking questions’ is super important. The confidence that is like: ‘I get to ask questions!’ As well as trying to get out what you don’t understand. So, like even forming the question, which is something that we do, in some of my classes. But, one of the things that we actually we hear back from alumni, when they come back and visit us, is that they are surprised that their friends, their new friends in college from other schools, do not feel comfortable to talk with professors and do not feel comfortable in asking questions. And they did not realize that they were working on that. You know, they did not realize that that was part of what was going on in (name of the school).”

Regarding the students’ classroom participation, I explored with the participating teachers’ some challenges and positive aspects of students’ participation in alternative classrooms. Teacher B mentioned the positive aspects of students’ active participation in classroom discussions, such as that students can learn multiple perspectives and that she, as the teacher, also can learn more about the material through the different interpretations of her students. As she puts it:

“Relating to each other I do believe that we got to see how we can have multiple answers to the same a question that has multiple perspectives in the room. And then they learn how people think differently and, uh, that’s fun. It’s interesting. I like lot participation. So, I keep learning about the material, and I hear new ideas and people's notice to different parts of the text. Student #9 always asks questions that make [me] think. Love it.”

Teacher B also spoke, in general terms and not specifically of the classroom B, about challenges involving participation in classroom talk. She pointed out that participation is not something that can be taken for granted in alternative school classrooms. According to her, some factors that may explain
students’ non-participation in classroom discussions are, for example, the age of students; familiarity among the student in the classroom; and students’ perception of themselves. In teacher B’s words:

“And, the 11th graders are, you know, getting a little older and they predict what someone is going to say because they’ve been [in] class with them for years. And, then they don’t listen anymore. Or, they have categorized themselves, in some way, as non-participative.”

Teacher B gave an example of a particular classroom (not analyzed in this study) in which students did not want to talk and share their ideas. She explains that, however, they were good students. In this passage, she raises some of the reasons for the students’ reluctance in participate in the talk in those classes, such as being sleepy, being humble, not willing to share their writings, or not willing to have a dialogue:

“Or, I come to rely on a lot [of] participation and I have a class that [I] got in the first period this year and that no one wants to talk. That’s, uh, it’s been really challenging. So, I have to come up with more structured activities, where is not free form at all because they just won’t. . . . But it’s in the beginning of day, and they are very good students, ( ) are internal, of course [laughing]. . . . But their writing is fabulous. But no one is willing to share, their writing. I think that they are humble. I think that they are sleepy. But it’s very challenging because a lot of them during presentation are very certain about what they have to speak. And, they are very confident in public speaking. They just are not willing to go have a dialogue.”

Teacher A explained that the informal approach of her class has positive and negative consequences in terms of students’ participation in an alternative classroom. 40 She explains that, while informal aspect of the classes can make some students feel less shy and therefore more motivated to participate in classroom talk, the informality of the classes can also be a door for some students to make “bad choices” in terms of behavior. One example of students’ “bad choices,” as teacher A comments, is when some students choose to go to the bathroom as an excuse for leaving the classroom. However, teacher A explains that making those choices is part of the learning process for those students. She adds that those students receive adult orientation when they are making the wrong decisions. In teacher A’s own words:

40 I observed one aspect of this informality in the culture of the school: in the school areas and in the observed classrooms, students were often observed calling their teachers by their first names.
“Yeah. That it can be a cool and a complicated thing. So, the tone is, I think that the tone is pretty informal. The hope is that that ‘informalness’ brings out the ‘shyer’ and quieter voices and makes people comfortable. And the more comfortable they are, the more they will participate. And I think that it is true. So, but it has its complications. Do you know, the kids, some of them, ask to go to the bathroom or to go to get a drink. That’s not a firm fast rule. You know, they need to take care of themselves, they can. Though, you can see in this class, there are three kids who really struggle, who consistently struggle with those choices. And, they can sink their experience, making that wrong choice too many days. But that’s part of the learning process. I mean, that’s part of what they are here. It’s not just to be learning about geology, it’s to be learning how to navigate themselves and to navigate the world. And, to practice making good choices and feeling rewarded for these choices, and supported by the people around them making them good choices and gently reminded, when [they] are not making. I mean, gently, maybe firmly, but not probably heavy (handed).”

Regarding the school’s discipline, the staff member commented on the distinct disciplinary approach of the school as he compared the autonomy of teachers and students in the school. He pointed out that teachers have fewer mechanisms to hold students accountable for misbehavior when compared to traditional schools, such as grades or relying on the principal’s authority. In his words:

“In terms of the teaching, teaching in-depth, teaching what you want to teach, most teachers who come here like that. As you can imagine, for most of us, we get treat like professionals in terms of our own choices and decisions. And that (resonates) well with folks, whether the results of that are good or bad. I think that people tend to like that. Staffs, I think, have a more challenging time around the issues of authority, accountability, autonomy when it comes to students. Ah, you know, some [of] them come sometimes [from] the school[s] where they can send students to the principal if they are not behaving. Or, they have grades to try to hold them accountable. And this school requires a level of, some of the research said, ‘personal charisma.’ And that isn’t necessarily as highly required in a traditional school, where there are all these structures put in place.”

The school approach to address the students’ misbehavior or resistance to participate seems to have roots in the libertarian orientation of the school. In the interview, the staff member raised this topic when I pointed out that I had noticed that some students choose not to participate in discussions during All School Meetings:

“Oh. Yeah. I think that we come from a libertarian orientation towards education which says that we want education be such in the internal motivation of each child. But we know that children respond to the environment around them, and that they read the boundaries and they pick close attention to the structures, etc. So, we are always, I hope, evolving in trying to figure out ways to both address the internal desires and motivations of students and provide the kind of structures and boundaries needed to help to foster students to be successful as they can.”
As the staff member explained, the libertarian orientation of the school inspired the school to seek to develop the internal motivations of learning in the students instead of focusing the students’ attention on compliance. In another part of the interview with the staff member, the topic of internal motivation versus compliance was brought up again. The topic was developed when I asked the staff member whether students who were enrolled in this school because of their misbehavior in other schools would do well in this new environment. The staff member clarified that the approach of the school is to help these students to develop the habits that they are lacking instead of inducing students just to comply with what they have to. In the staff member’s own words:

“I think that the reality is for many students who failed in other schools with bad habits, who come on with them in mind is: ‘This is why you are in this class. You are in this class to learn how to read and how write, listen and speak. You are not here because you need to do your homework and to comply with that. And you are not doing these things because you have not been able to complete homework.’ Let’s talk about that. It is trying to be specific about their strengths and their challenges as opposed to ‘just do what you are supposed to do, and you will get out of here.’ You know, that is you are complying ( ). So, that’s a way of trying to focus them on the deeper motivation of learning, at least learning skills. And now you are at developing your habits and having more personal responsibility for that, than nearly ‘you got enough, what you are going to do to make better than enough, in order to pass.’”

In this passage, the staff member commented that, rather than focus on students’ compliance, the school’s orientation is to teach the habits to address the issues related to misbehavior or poor academic performance of the students. The goal is to develop a deep learning motivation of students. This strategy is consistent with the school practice of separately evaluating students’ knowledge and skills apart from the students’ habits and class expectations, as discussed early in this chapter.

In the next chapter, I describe some characteristics of teacher B’s classroom settings that may play a role in creating a comfortable environment for inviting students’ participation in classroom talk. I also explain how students participated in the classroom talk and which activities instigated students to participate more. Then, I discuss the participation of the group of students who were involved in this study. I describe the analysis of classroom-B communications that shows diverse types of students’ initiations, focusing on a particular format of students’ initiations, the students’ questions. Lastly, I
analyze a particular type of interaction between the teacher and students, a question-question sequence of interaction, a particular form by which students asked questions of the teacher.

Chapter 5: Findings

A. Classroom B Settings, Activities, and Organization of Classes

The classroom B settings seemed to be arranged to avoid a sterile institutional classroom environment. The common arrangement of the tables in classroom B was set in a way that favored face-to-face interactions among the students. Students’ seats were placed in a circular arrangement of large tables at which more than one student could sit. Other tables were often placed in the inner area formed by the circular arrangement of tables, which also were commonly used by some students. Students did not have a fixed place to sit, even though some students consistently sat in the same place. Two students were often observed informally sitting on top of a short built-in bookshelf along the classroom windows. Teacher B often taught by standing at the front of the circular arrangement of the tables. Sometimes, teacher B also sat on one of the tables with students, near her desk, or on top of it, therefore showing a more casual way of being in the classroom.

Classroom B had diverse printed materials hanging on the walls, such as posters of art for decoration and instructional materials. Some of these materials were related to the process of thinking about history. For example, on the wall, a timeline displayed some historical events to serve as chronological references. Also, at the back of the classroom, on the wall, there were displayed a series of sheets with written concepts used to analyze historical processes, such as continuity and change; context; causality; contingency; complexity; culture; and interconnectivity. The classroom also had several shelves filled with books.

The common activities observed in classroom B during the period of data collection were as follows:

1) Collective reading of texts and a novel, often by the teacher, accompanied of class discussion of the passages just read. The discussions were led by the teacher but with openings for students’ initiations. In
these activities, students were observed writing notes in the margins of the texts. In the case of the novel, students took notes on post-its and added the post-its to the book pages. At the end of the class, teacher B often collected students’ copies of the texts with their margin notes.  

2) Class lectures conducted using IRF sequences by the teacher but with openings for students’ initiations. Teacher B often wrote the questions that oriented her class discussion or drew a scheme with important points to be discussed. Usually, during the discussions, the scheme was filled in with students’ contributions. Class discussions were also conducted with support of other materials, such as poems, historical documents, and illustrations.

3) Group discussions organized with two or more students. In one of these discussions, for example, students prepared for a debate (which was not observed) in which each student would take a stand to argue about one of four given points of view on United States foreign policies. Students were organized into four larger groups. Another variation of group discussion paired two students, who discussed a topic or idea before sharing them with the entire classroom.

4) Individual assignments done with students alone or in the company of colleagues. In one of these individual assignments, for example, students were doing a freewriting activity to prepare for an essay assignment.

5) Explanation of the assignments, which included discussion of the procedures and deadlines. In many of the class sessions observed, students often asked questions to clarify the procedures.

The “sequence of organization” (Mehan 1979) of the events in classroom B usually took the following pattern:

1) An opening that was characterized by the students coming to the class and taking their seats while teacher B wrote on the board the class agenda. In this phase, very often the noise produced by students’ talk gradually decreased as teacher B was writing the agenda.

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41 Once, teacher B explained to me that one of the goals of collecting the readings was to check students’ interpretations.
2) The first instructional session, in which one or various activities, such as those listed above, took place. The instructional sessions followed the written agenda.

3) A short interval, which was set for students to use the restrooms and drink water. Not all students usually left the classroom during this interval. The students remaining in the classroom were often observed talking and socializing with colleagues and the teacher.

4) The second instructional session, in which one or various activities, such as those listed above, took place.

5) A closing, usually without warning by the teacher about the end of the class session. The signs of closing were characterized by students talking louder; conversations between the teacher and individual students; and students helping to organize the space, such as placing the chairs on the top of the tables to facilitate the later cleaning of the room.

B. Students’ Participation

Students often participated in classroom talk, by responding to teacher B’s questions or initiating interactions with her. Students’ participation occurred very often in classroom discussions, especially in discussions that involved the reading of the texts and books, but also during the lectures. On these occasions, students’ participation occurred after the teacher paused the reading and asked a question. Very often, students would reply, especially after the teacher’s questions. But contributions were also in a form of initiation, which could be in the form of a comment or question. On other occasions, teacher B opened the floor for students’ questions or comments right after the teacher read a passage; students asked about or commented on it.

In relation to the lectures, for example, one particular situation that prompted many students’ initiations and replies occurred after teacher B asked for students’ opinions about a historical fact. This situation occurred after a lecture about the European age of explorations and the conquest of indigenous

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42 Even though the school does not have a bell to mark the end of periods, students, in general, seemed to be aware of the end of each class session.
populations in the Americas. In that lecture, many students engaged in the discussion by providing their opinions and even disagreeing with the teacher’s opinion. Also, students commonly posed questions after teacher B had set out an assignment or a task, with the student’s goal of clarifying the procedures or deadlines.

During whole classroom discussions or small group discussions, participating students were also observed (and audio recorded) addressing one another’s remarks, or even answering other students’ questions, a classroom type of conversation termed cross-discussion (Lemke 1990). Below, excerpt 1 illustrates a particular situation in which a cross-discussion happened, i.e., a student answers (student #9, on line 14) another student’s question (student #5, on line 13). This situation occurred after teacher B opened the floor for possible students’ questions about the vocabulary in a study guide that discussed different stands on United States foreign policies. After student #9 answers student #5’s question, teacher B also addressed student #5’s question (lines 16 and 17).

Excerpt 1: [(26) TB5 p.18 (Regime 15:58)]

1  TB: = For this activity, I am not sure. I think that you might have to pick one, and
2                      and [(   )]
3  S#9: [(Okay)]
4  TB: (Right.) ((Low voice))
5                      Any vocabulary? Student #7?
6  S#7: What is the last word?
7  TB: Regime?
8  S#7: What (does) that (mean)?
9  TB: It’s like a word for a government, um, that is, that has a bad connotation. Like
10             a group of people in power who don’t have necessarily have legitimacy, a
11             regime.

43 In classroom B, small-group discussions were not audio recorded because it was technically difficult to audio record groups’ conversations with non-participating students present.

44 In the transcripts reported in this study, “TB” refers to teacher B; “S#” refers to a specific participating student; “SF” refers to a non-participating female student; “SM” refers to a non-participating male student; and “Ss” refers to a group with two or various students, which may include participating and non-participating students. See Appendix B for a more detailed explanation of transcription signs adopted in this study.
During the classroom discussions, students were sometimes observed informally obtaining the floor without requesting it from the teacher or without raising a hand after the teacher had asked a question of the class. At certain moments, when various students wanted to talk, teacher B often managed the use of the floor, by giving order to the students’ talk.

Students’ participation in classroom talk was not uniform; some students used the floor to participate more than others. The nine participating students (students #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, and #9) were often engaged in classroom discussions, even though the participation of some of these students varied throughout the days on which the data was collected. In the group of participating students there were not significant differences between female and male participation. However, one participant male student stood out among all participating students (and the remaining group) in terms of the number of initiations with the teacher. Four students who did not participate in the study were often observed participating in classroom discussions. During the period of data collection, the students who did not often participate in classroom B discussions were those who did not participate in the study.

C. Students’ Initiations

Students’ initiations indicate their active participation in the classroom talk and students’ initiative in pursuing learning. After transcribing the communications of classroom B, I collected all sequences involving the participating students’ initiations in each classroom.\(^\text{45}\) However, only the

\(^{45}\) I also conducted these procedures for teacher A’s classroom communications.
initiations that were sufficiently audible to determine what students were accomplishing with their utterances were considered.

Students’ initiations were identified by reading each participant’s turn in all transcriptions of the audio-recorded classes. Each turn was coded in terms of participants’ actions typically observed in classroom contexts, such as teacher’s directives, teacher’s feedbacks, teacher’s questions, teacher’s responses, students’ replies, different types of students’ initiations, and students’ questions. To distinguish initiations of other types of students’ actions, I followed a set of criteria. Replies typically conformed to the teacher’s elicitations, i.e., students’ replies that conform to an IRF sequence were not coded as initiations. However, there were exceptions. For example, if a student replied to a teacher’s elicitation with another question, the action was coded as an initiation. Below is a table that presents these criteria, which was adopted and expanded from Celia Oyler’s (1996) study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions Counted as an Initiation</th>
<th>Excluded Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reply to a teacher’s elicitation to change the topic or to add information</td>
<td>Reply to a teacher’s elicitation (IRF) or any other teacher’s question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reply to a teacher’s question with another question</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question or comment after the teacher formally opening the floor for students’ questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response or remark that introduces a different topic from the turn of talk that preceded it</td>
<td>Response or remark to another student’s initiation that does not change the topic, bring new information, or formulate a new argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reintroduction of an early discussed topic after the earlier topic was changed by preceding turns, by adding new information or asking a question</td>
<td>Reformulation of a question already asked by another student in a preceding turn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Coding Criteria for Students’ Initiations

There were numerous instances of students’ initiations in teacher B’s classroom. In eight hours and 59 minutes of audio recordings taken in classroom B, I estimated 179 cases of students’ initiations. Most of the students’ initiations (126 cases) occurred in a question format.

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46 Students’ initiations also occurred very often in teacher A’s classroom. In an estimate of participating students’ questions, I counted 68 students’ questions in 5 hours and 43 minutes of recordings, which involved seven participating students. While it was possible to identify many of the participating students’ questions in the audio recordings of classroom A, many of these participating students’ questions or the subsequent exchanges with teacher A were not completely audible.
One of the first steps adopted to analyze the data was to observe the kinds of students’ initiations that occurred in the classroom. This step was conducted by comparing the participating students’ initiations in classroom B with Celia Oyler’s (1996) initiation typology. Types similar to Oyler’s (1996) initiations typology were identified in the data, such as “questioning for understanding” (asking questions for better understanding of a text or word); “understanding the text” (offering an interpretation of a text passage); “intertextual link” (providing a textual link to a current discussion of a text); “claiming expertise” (providing knowledge from outside the discussed text, making argument or offering a point of view about the text or topic of the discussion); and “affective response” (displaying surprise or personal feeling evoked by the discussed text or information provided by the teacher).

I also identified some students’ initiations not described in Oyler’s (1996) typology. For example, there were situations in which students disagreed or agreed with teacher’s opinions, interpretations, or suggestions. The disagreement initiation was found, for example, in the context of an opinion about a historic passage, during a clarification about the criteria for building an argument for an essay assignment, or an interpretation of a student’s drawing. A different initiation type was found when a student initiated an interaction to repair some of the teacher’s words.

Excerpt 2 below illustrates one initiation in which a student displays a *pre-disagreement* (Schegloff 2007, 102) with a teacher’s use of a concept to analyze the book *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Gabriel García Marquéz. The excerpt occurs during a teacher’s explanation about how to write an essay assignment on the book. Teacher B was discussing the assignment sheet, which has instructions about how to write the essay. The passage analyzed here begins when teacher B refers to a concept of microcosm, which was early mentioned in that classroom session (not shown here) and in previous classroom sessions. For a students’ essay assignment, teacher B had suggested the use of the microcosm concept to analyze the book. Even though in this passage the teacher does not refer to that

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47 The termed *pre-disagreement* (Schegloff 2007, 102) was used to characterize this initiation because the student did not implicitly disagree with the use of the concept of microcosm; he did not openly state a disagreement. The student skillfully seemed to use a question for challenging the teacher’s suggestion (see Bolden and Robinson [2011] as to how Why-questions can be used to challenge an addressee responsible for “an event”). By using a question to challenge the teacher’s use of the concept, the student avoided directly confronting the teacher.
concept itself, she alludes to it (lines 1-3). The teacher tells the students that one possible interpretation (lines 2-3) would be to consider the town described in the story as representing the world and the main character of the story, Santiago Nasar, as representing Latin America.

**Excerpt 2: [(34) TB7 – pp. 24-26 (Microcosm 26:51)]**

1  TB: So, is the town Latin America as Gabriel Garcia Marquez wants us to understand it? Or, and, or, is the town the world, the entire world, and Santiago Nasar is Latin America?
2  Ss: ((Students talk in the background))
3  TB: You can play a lot with those ideas.
4  S#9: I mean, how, I am curious and (annoyed) (   )
5  TB: Where did the idea of microcosm actually originate?
6  S#9: Because, you know, or why (do) we assume that it is a microcosm?
7  TB: Because, I think, there is not a lot of thought around it, but I haven’t actually seen any evidence for it.
8  TB: Yeah. I think that this is the kind of thing that we might argue. Uh, and that becomes an argument rather than a fact, matter of fact. A matter of fact would be this book takes place in a small town. Nobody can argue with that. But when you write an essay that has an argument, you say the small town is a microcosm for Latin America or the world, and then you present the case. Or, your argument could be some people say that this town is a microcosm. That’s not what it is. It’s actually, dot, dot, dot.
9  TB: So, your paper has to have some element of something people could get into an argument about.
10  SF: ((   ))
11  S#9 (?): ((Muttered laughter))
12  TB: To meet expectations.
13  SF: ((   ))
14  S#9: (oh/all right) ((Very low voice))
15  TB: And one of those, uh, one of this four (words/rows) has to generate for you that argument. So, look at the four now and figure out if any of them draw, draw you more than others. You’ll finish reading the book.
16  TB: And if we have time, the next step is to choose your topic and find quotes. So,
When student #9 takes the floor, he queries (lines 7 and 8) about the source of the concept microcosm (“Where did the idea of microcosm actually originate?”) and about the reasons for the use of that concept to analyze the town [“why (do) we assume that it is a microcosm?”]. Then, the student justifies (line 9 and 10) his questioning by saying that the concept was not thoroughly thought out (“there is not a lot of thought around it”) and that he saw a lack of evidence in the book to support the use of that concept (“I haven’t actually seen any evidence for it.”)

The teacher’s reply (lines 11-20) does not display opposition to the student’s challenge. Teacher B begins her turn by using the word “yeah,” which does not create dissent with the student’s disagreement. Next, the teacher explains (lines 11-14) to the student the difference between the concept of an argument and a matter of fact, perhaps to address the student’s mention of the word “evidence” in his last turn and to clarify the notion of argument that could be at the source of the student’s disagreement.

In the same turn, teacher B explains (lines 14-15) how the concept of microcosm could be used as an argument in the essay, thus supporting her suggestion to the class. The teacher also addresses (lines 16-17) the student’s questioning about the concept by proposing that a refutation of the idea of the town as a microcosm could be a possible alternative argument for his essay (“Or, your argument could be some people say that this town is a microcosm. That’s not what it is. It’s actually, dot, dot, dot.”). The teacher’s proposal implies that students may not agree with her suggestions and offers an alternative for the student to develop his own argument. In this passage, it is not clear whether the student agreed (line 24) or not (line 21) with the teacher’s explanation and/or proposal.48

48 Other participating students’ initiations cases in the data that encompassed disagreeing with the teacher had different developments, such as one case in which the teacher and the student kept bringing up additional points to sustain their different opinions about a historical passage.
D. Teacher Management of the Floor

In general, teacher B oriented her behavior to address the participating students’ initiations in the classroom, i.e., she replied after a student’s initiation even though a reply did not always include an answer (see discussion below on what differentiates an answer from a response). There were two types of situations in which the teacher did not address a student’s initiation, more specifically some students’ questions. One type of situation involved one occasion, when teacher B seemed to be doing a task other than leading the discussion, and she requested the help of a teacher aide to answer a student’s question. A second type of situation involved one specific student (student #9), who initiated most of the collected and observed initiations in classroom B during the period of the study. These situations occurred in specific contexts, such as when the student repetitively took the floor; when the teacher seemed to treat the student’s question as straying from the main discussion; when the teacher was conducting another activity or lecturing; or when the student interrupted an ongoing activity that involved another student’s response.

The abundance of various students’ initiations in classroom B did not appear to be a consequence of a lack of floor management. The data show situations in which teacher B managed the use of the floor to ensure that initiations (1) were focused on or relevant to the discussion or an activity; (2) did not delay the agenda of the class; (3) did not interrupt her talk, other student’s talk, or an ongoing activity; and (4) were done in a coordinated way among the students. Below, I present some instances that illustrate these practices.

(1) To Ensure Focus on a Discussion/Activity

Excerpt 3 below shows a situation in which teacher B and students had strayed from the main topic of a discussion, which was centered on the ethical, political, social, and economic aspects related to European conquest of native peoples in the Americas. At a certain point, the students and teacher started to talk about Christopher Columbus and the route that he took as an attempt to reach India. In this context, student #9 asked a question (lines 6 and 8) that could have been perceived by teacher B as further pushing
the discussion from the main discussion. Teacher B answered the student’s question (line 10) and further evaluated it (line 17). Then, teacher B resumed the main discussion (by uttering “okay”) and stated the topic that was under discussion (lines 18 and 19). To ensure that all students were focused on the discussion, she also warned (lines 20 and 21) group of students who were pursuing a side talk that she would move one of them to a different place in the classroom.

Excerpt 3: [TB2 – P. 11-12 (Panama Canal 10:58)]

1  TB:    And what he [referring to Christopher Columbus] was trying to avoid was a trade route ( ) he was trying to get to::: where to avoid contact with um,
2  SF:    ( )
3  TB:    He was trying to avoid the Islamic world to get to (3) Asia and going the opposite way and through =
4  S#9:  = So, how long was it =
5  TB:    = (Islamic world) was dangerous place
6  S#9:  = How long was it between Columbus and the Panama Canal?
7  (2)
8  TB:    1906 minus 1492 ((laughing voice))
9  S#9:  hh ( ) I’m just (talking/thinking) about like
10  TB:   [((cough))]  
11  S#9:  [the ( ) time] between when they could go around the world and when they ( )
12  TB:   Oh, when they could go straight through?
13  S#9:  Yeah.
14  TB:   Good question.
15  S#9:  
16  TB:   Okay. We’re back to, the question on the, on the table is: What did 16\textsuperscript{th}-
17  S#9:  century people think of themselves?
18  TB:   Someone in that corner may have to move up here ( ) chatting and distracting over there.
19  S#9:  What did they think of themselves? What is it like to be one of these arrows?
20  ( . . .)
(2) To Attend to the Class Agenda

Excerpt 4 below presents the teacher telling the students that her goal was to begin an activity rather than talk about how to do it. The activity consisted of freewriting about some quotes that the students had withdrawn from the book *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*; the activity was supposed to help the students develop their essay arguments about the book. This excerpt occurs after teacher B had answered a series of students’ questions about how to write the actual essay. After responding (“Yeah,” on line 8) to student #8’s comment (line 7), teacher B stated that the students should do the activity (line 8) rather than discuss how to do it. Teacher B also limited (line 9) the use of the floor by telling the students that the floor would be open for one more student question (“Last thing”).

Excerpt 4: [TB8 p. 21 (Last Thing 2 (20:25))]

1  TB:  Well, I want you to have an idea. But then by at the end of today have
2  articulated something. So, there are 22 different arguments in this room [and
3  not]=
4  S#8:  =[(so that’s)] why (it’s supposed to be drawn) really (drawn) on topic (that we
5  chose.)
6  TB:  Yeah.
7  →  S#8:  Then we choose quotes around that and then later ( ).
8  →  TB:  Yeah. I think we should do rather than talking about doing. Then, we will
9  →  process when we are done. Last thing.
10  SM:  (   )
11  TB:  No. You can. But, I hope you have a different argument about why. You put in
12  a slightly different way and you’re noticing slightly different choices that you
13  [(raise)]

---

49 However, the activity did not occur right after the student’s last question (not shown here) because, by request of some students, teacher B introduced an example of how to write an essay around an argument.
(3) To Avoid Interruptions

Excerpt 5 below shows teacher B’s not addressing a student’s question (line 13) when the student tried to obtain the floor (line 12) during an ongoing activity. In that activity, the teacher was calling the students – in a specific order – for them to provide specific words that students had found in a collection of poems. The poems were attributed to people in the Triple Alliance, the groups in the Aztec empire at the time of the conquest. Students were supposed to find words that expressed the world view of those people. The context of this passage shows student #9 trying (line 12) to obtain the floor when teacher B was calling on a certain pair of students to elicit the words that they found in the poems. The passage shows the teacher’s resuming the activity by calling on the next students assigned to talk (line 15), instead of addressing student #9’s question.

Excerpt 5: [TB3 p.6 (Interruption 3:45)]

1  S#6: Uh, I was (still looking for), but, uh. I just (   ) “riches” (like). Yeah. Uh, and
2  “ illusions” here. And then also “beginning” and “endings.”
3  TB: “Illusions” like illusory things [that] you see?
4  S#6: [Yeah.] whoa (   )
5  TB: What?
6  S#6: Yes.
7  TB: Is that the word?
8  S#6: Yes.
9  S#1: Yeah. We also have “illusions.”
10 TB: “Illusions”?  
11 S#1: Yeah.
12 → S#9: Well what do you call a (   )?
13 → TB: (   ) Let’s go to (the)
14 S#9: Sorry.
15 TB: Uh, student #7, you two had two? What did you see?
16 S#7: Yeah. Uh, in (the) first one we had had “flowers,” and then that “poverty”
17 [(   )] =
18 TB: = [Pov]erty?
(4) To Coordinate Students’ Initiations

Excerpt 6 below shows the teacher’s coordinating students’ initiations during a discussion. Student #9 and teacher B were in an ongoing dialogue about an interpretation of a collection of texts (packet) that presented different points of view about United States foreign policy. When student #1 took the floor (line 10) to offer a related point of view about the discussed subject, teacher B intervened (line 13) to ensure that student #9 had finished his reasoning before ceding (line 15) the floor to student #1.


1
S#9
Uh, (1) I was just curious if there was some kind of conflict of interest because
2
(1) it seems that like they were chalking the United States up to be such a
great place, such economic opportunity. And then, after going on about that,
3
all the, all of that, and they were like, had these little sentences like but “by the
4
way,” they were trying cast this in gross domes, domestic product. And then
5
just that was it.
6
7
TB: Can they both be true?
8
S#9 Yeah. But like (1), the, the fact that they kinda like went extensively into it.
9
And then, just added this kinda side note that like defeated the whole rest of it.
10  →  S#1: (The packet is about) (.) the United States=
11   TB: = ( )
12  →  S#1: Sorry
13  →  TB: Are you done?
14   S#9: Yeah
15  →  TB: Go on
16   S#1: The packet is, is about the United States’ role in the world, right?
17   ( . . . )

E. Students’ Questions

As mentioned above, the data shows a high frequency of students’ initiations in classroom B. After considering all types of students’ initiations, the analysis focused on students’ questions given the higher frequency of this format among students’ initiations and because of the high degree of student
initiative that is embedded in the act of asking, especially considering the students’ institutional role of replying teachers’ questions in classroom settings.

Ignasi Clemente (2015, 76) explains that questions exert high control in the “progressivity of an interaction” by directing what is going to be discussed next. Clemente (2015, 76) analogizes the act of asking a question with the driving with a passenger in a car. In Clemente’s analogy, the driver is asking a question and leading the passenger into a conversation topic. Conversely, the passenger is answering the question and being brought into a conversation topic. Thus, questions carry the force of selecting the topic of a talk and narrowing the options for the recipients’ subsequent actions to, for example, answering, providing more information, clarifying a point, or justifying a non-answer (Boyd and Heritage 2006, 155).

Elliot Mishler (1975, 105) points out that, through the act of questioning, “one speaker attempts to exert control over another.” The questioner also determines the “way in which the other is to continue with the conversation and thus define[s] their relationship to each other along a dimension of power and authority” (Mishler 1975, 105).

Thus, by focusing on students’ question, the analysis of their questions could reveal the extent to which students exert a degree of control in the learning process in the classroom talk.

F. Answers and Responses

Because questions require answers, a discussion of what constitutes an answer also needs to be formulated. A question-answer unit is a type of adjacency pair. Thus, a speaker’s question makes an answer relevant (Stivers and Robinson 2006, 371) as the next action to be performed by the recipient. However, not all actions by a recipient of a question constitute an “answer.” Clemente (2015) defines “answer” as a category of response that “close[s] the question-answer sequence” and therefore “promot[es] the progress of the activity at hand” (78). Thus, an answer must match the action initiated by the questioner.
Heritage (1984) explains that there is a second category of response, commonly termed *non-answer responses*, in which a recipient addresses the speaker’s question but does not answer the question. Heritage (1984) points out that *non-answer responses* are typically justifications or accounts in which the recipient states a lack of knowledge about the information sought by the questioner. Clemente (2015) adds that a non-answer, such as “I don’t know,” is a response type that does not answer a question because it does not “close” the adjacency pair sequence and “does not move the activity at hand forward” (78).

Another category of response, pointed out by Clemente (2015), is answers in which a speaker does not comply with the grammatical forms used by the questioner, i.e., “the speakers answer in their own terms but not in the terms proposed by the speaker who asks the question” (78).

A fourth category, known as an *insertion sequence*, is also mentioned by Heritage (1984, 251) as special type of response. In Heritage’s own words: “This discussion can now be concluded by a brief consideration of a further class of cases in which a question is responded to with another question which does not hearably ‘answer’ the first, but yet the conditionally relevant answer is not treated as officially or noticeably absent” (1984, 251). In other words, there are situations when a recipient of a question responds to the questioner with another question (i.e., “question responses”) and the lack of an answer is not perceived as an absence of response by the questioner.

In these cases, the speaker’s question is often put “on hold” while the recipient’s question assumes priority to be first answered by the first speaker. Ultimately, the first question is answered by the recipient, therefore completing the adjacency pair related to that question. However, as Heritage (1984, 251) points out, the sequence of actions described in the inserted-sequence concept are not infallible; the sequence of actions unfolded in that way is a matter of preference to which most speakers orient their behavior.

Elliot Mishler (1975) also analyzed *question responses* in classroom talk and referred to them as *arching*. Mishler (1975) argues that the act of *arching* is an attempt by the recipient of a question to gain control of the interaction and that the presence of *arching* in discourse may signal some degree of
symmetry between the speakers. In Mishler’s (1975) own words: “To ask a question in response to a question is an act of countercontrol and may require either that there be a ‘true’ differential in social power where the responder has more real authority or, at the minimum, that there be equality between the speakers” (1975, 106). David Wood and Heather Wood (1984) consider question responses as “one mark of relative equality in discourse,” and these responses often indicates that the person who was first “questioned is negotiating the conditions under which he is prepared to respond; calculating the implications of a given response; assessing the questioner’s need and right to know, and so on” (284). This type of response is further discussed in this chapter, in the section dedicated to the analysis of students’ questions.

G. Analysis of Students’ Questions

In the second phase of the analysis, I drew from CA’s approach. The CA perspective on “questions” is that they can assume different forms and are not restricted to the syntactic forms accomplished by interrogatives (Ehrlich and Freed 2010, 04). Common interrogatives are Wh-questions, i.e., question that begin with words like when, how, why, where, and who (e.g., “What is fatality?”); yes/no questions (e.g., “I mean, is there a kind of borderline there?”); tag questions (e.g., “The packet is about the United States’ role in the world, right?”); and alternative questions (e.g., “Is he talking about getting married or having sex?”). Some utterances, such as a simple word or clause, can also have the force of questioning (e.g., “Which one?”). Another example of a non-interrogative question, known as a declarative question, is an affirmative utterance projected with a rising intonation at the end of the utterance (e.g., “It was like a funeral?”).

On the other hand, interrogative forms cannot be coded indiscriminately as questions because they may be used by speakers to carry actions other than seeking information – for example, carrying out an accusation (Heritage and Roth 1995). CA solves the problem of coding focusing on the analysis of the current interaction. In this way, the analyst should observe whether the utterance was treated by the recipient as a question. This study adopted this strategy to identify whether a student’s utterance was
treated by the teacher as a question or whether a student treated a teacher’s utterance as a question. After I analyzed whether an utterance had the force of questioning, I coded the students’ questions by using a CA typology developed by John Heritage and Andrew Roth (1995) to analyze questions in broadcast news interviews.

I adopted one particular type of student questions, Wh-questions, to start a second phase of coding the data. The coding began with the Wh-questions because of its high frequency in the data. This coding phase had the goal of identifying patterns in the interactions between teacher B and participating students. The table below shows the types of questions and respective number of students’ questions found in the classroom B audio recordings. Note that these questions constitute a sample of questions (taken from nine classroom B sessions) that involved the participating students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Questions</th>
<th>Frequency of Students’ Questions in Classroom B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wh-questions:</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes/No questions:</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag questions:</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declarative questions:</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative questions:</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-Event Statements</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions formulated with lexical and phrasal/clause items</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of questions:</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Types and frequencies of students’ questions

In this second phase of coding, each student’s Wh-question and the teacher’s responses were coded for forms of occurrences typically used in CA analysis of interactions, such as silence, laughter, repetition in words, repairs, type of responses, delay in responses, overlaps, and latched talk. Each participant’s turn (i.e., participants’ position in a sequence of interaction) was separately coded with the goal of identifying what action was accomplished in each participant’s turn. After having all students’ Wh-questions and teacher’s respective responses coded, I started to identify patterns among these codes.

A specific pattern emerged from the codes, a pattern termed insertion sequences or question responses (mentioned above). This sequence refers to situations in which students responded to the
teacher’s questions with another question. This type of question appeared to be of special interest because it apparently indicated a certain degree of control over the classroom talk by the students. Further considerations about the relevance of this pattern in classroom talk are explained in the next section.

After identifying the insertion sequence pattern, I coded all remaining types of student questions afterwards to learn more about the extension and the nature of this pattern in the interactions between teacher B and her students. Examples of this pattern were also found among the other types of students’ questions that were coded with Heritage and Roth’s (1995) typology.

Next, I draw from CA approach to conduct a discourse analysis focused on this pattern.

II. Students’ Inserted Questions

The student’s act of inserting a question after a teacher’s question creates a different order of answers in the interaction. The student’s question would put the teacher’s question “on hold” by generating a preference for the answer to the student’s question. In this way, the teacher’s question would be answered by the student after the student’s question is answered by the teacher. Insertion sequences have been described as a relatively common situation in ordinary conversations (Heritage 1984, 251). However, students’ inserted questions are documented as a relatively rare phenomenon in classroom talk (Wood and Wood 1988, 284) and are less likely to occur in teacher-initiated interactions (Mishler 1975, 107).

In fact, as noted in chapter 2, the CA literature has showed that students’ questions are very unlikely to occur in the middle of an IRF sequence (Waring 2009, 809; Mehan 1979, 140), especially after a teacher’s question. Given teachers’ institutional authority in controlling the floor and their role of examiner, students are expected to answer teachers’ questions right after the question, instead of posing their own questions.

However, 17 cases of students’ inserted questions were found in the classroom B data. The presence of these inserted questions in the data indicates that the classroom B talk was not typical. This fact leads to some relevant questions about the students’ inserted-questions in classroom B. What kind of
actions did the students’ inserted questions carry out? Were the teacher’s questions deferred after students inserted questions? What kind of teacher’s responses did students receive in these situations? In the end, did the students answer the teacher’s questions?

As foreseen in the concept of *insertion sequence*, in classroom B a basic sequence of actions would unfold with the following organization of adjacency pairs⁵⁰:

**First Adjacency Pair**

- T: Question 1 – First Pair Part 1 (Q1 FPP1)
  - S1: Question 2 – First Pair Part 2 (Q2 FPP2)
  - T: Answer 2 – Second Pair Part 2 (A2 SPP2)
  - S1: Answer 1 – Second Pair Part 1 (A1 SPP1)

**Second Adjacency Pair**

**Third Adjacency Pair**

Another variation of the same scheme is shown below, when a student asks more than one question (Q2 and Q3) and gets the respective answers by the teacher (A2 and A3) before finally answering (A1) the teacher’s first question (Q1).

**First Adjacency Pair**

- T: Q1 FPP1
  - S1: Q2 FPP2
  - T: A2 SPP2
  - S1: Q3 FPP3
  - T: A3 SPP3
  - S1: A1 SPP1

In this analysis, an *insertion sequence* will be referred to as an *inserted-question sequence* since the actions of the teacher and students in this study did not always follow the *insertion sequence* organization of the actions as shown in the schemes above. I designate as genuine-*insertion sequences* situations in which a teacher’s and a student’s actions follow the same actions as in an *insertion sequence*.

The following analysis demonstrates the possibilities found in the data in terms of the teacher’s and students’ actions after a student’s inserted-question is posed. Also, not all students’ inserted questions were made within the teacher’s IRF sequences. The data show a case in which a student’s inserted question occurred during a dialogue between a teacher and a student. This case is explained separately.

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⁵⁰ Adjacency pair is a form of interaction that is comprised of two different speakers’ actions that are linked to one another. The terminology of questions/answers adjacency pair is organized in the following way:

Speaker 1: asks a question (Q) that is the first pair part (FPP) of an adjacency pair

Speaker 2: answers the question (A) that is the second pair part (SPP) of the same adjacency pair.
because, there, the expectation that a teacher’s question will receive an answer is different than in situa
tions in which a teacher asks an IRF question (see analysis in section J of this chapter).

I. Students’ Inserted Question in a Teacher’s IRF Sequence

Sixteen cases of students’ inserted questions occurred after a teacher’s IRF question. Below, I analyze the
genuine-insertion sequences and variations of students’ inserted questions in the teacher’s and student’s
interactions and the actions of the teacher and students in light of the discussed literature.

1. Genuine-Insertion Sequence

In a classroom context, a typical IRF sequence would follow a student’s reply and would finish with a feedback action by the teacher. As mentioned before, in a genuine-insertion sequence, the teacher’s question would be put “on hold” because the student’s inserted question becomes the relevant question to be first answered. However, in a genuine inserted-question sequence, an answer (A1) for a teacher’s question (Q1) would be provided by the student after the student had received an answer (A2) to his or her question (Q2). Note that, in classroom contexts, a student’s answer may not be “correct” or close the adjacency pair initiated with the teacher’s question. The degree of “correctness” of the answer is assessed by the teacher in the feedback turn, and a teacher may pursue the correct answer for her/his question by repeating the question to other students with the goal of obtaining a “correct” answer. For the effect of this analysis, a genuine-insertion sequence in an IRF sequence would follow the scheme below:

\[
\begin{align*}
T: & \text{Q1 FPP1 (I: Initiation)} \\
S1: & \text{Q2 FPP2} \\
T: & \text{A2 SPP2} \\
S1: & \text{A1 SPP1 (R: Reply)} \\
T: & \text{Feedback (F)}^{51}
\end{align*}
\]

---

51 As mentioned in chapter 2 (see page 8), a teacher’s feedback turn may be used to accomplish different actions other than just evaluating a student’s answer. A teacher, for example, can repeat the same question at the feedback position, thus indicating that the previous student’s answer is not the “right” answer sought by the teacher, or a teacher can use the feedback turn to probe a student’s answer with the goal of obtaining a more detailed answer.
To facilitate the analysis of the participant’s actions in the classroom, I ordered their turns of the inserted-question sequences in an IRF sequence as follows:

- First position → T: Q1 FPP1
- Second position → S1: Q2 FPP2
- Third position → T: A2 SPP2
- Fourth position → S1: A1 SPP1
- Fifth position → T: Feedback

Of all cases of inserted questions found in the data, only two cases fell within the genuine-insertion sequence type. One case involved a student’s requested clarification of a teacher’s question before answering the teacher’s question.

Excerpt 7 shows one of these two cases of genuine-insertion sequence. The excerpt shows a student performing a different action than answering the teacher’s question (line 5): the student provided relevant content for teacher B’s question using a question as a format. The excerpt was withdrawn from a class in which students and teacher B were reading and interpreting Gabriel García Marquéz’s Nobel Prize speech, The Solitude of Latin America. This exchange occurred after the students had a peer discussion (not shown here) about a part of the speech referencing historical events in some Latin American countries. These events reflected the social and political instability of the region in the 1970s and 1980s. The peer discussion was based on these questions from the teacher: “What is the effect of this list on the speech?”; and “What does he [Gabriel García Marquéz, the author of the speech] want you to start thinking about in relation to Latin America or in relation to our culture?” After the peer discussion, some students answered, and commented on, these questions to the class. Excerpt 7 shows part of this class discussion, when teacher B reframes (line 5) the previous questions by issuing the following question: “What is he trying to tell me about this region?” (which is, in this analysis, Q1). Right after formulating her question, teacher B nominates (line 5) student #9 to answer it.
Yeah.

So, putting us back on the ground. This is a speech, this is right in center of the speech “I am feeling bad,” “what happened here,” “what’s going on?,” “who is this voice?”

What is he trying to tell me about this region? Student #9?

Uh, is this whole communist, intro, introduction thing?

That’s a nice way of putting it. Yes.

Uh, and, (she), uh, (   ) to point out (the way he goes this like this), he writes this, uh, uh, he kind of starts out (   ) magic realism and then it gets a little bit more real. And then the facts seem almost (1) worse. [And]

[Yes]

And I think that he’s trying kinda capitalize on that (0.8) and point out this kinda like this almost the opposite of, uh, Magical Realism (1) or the=

What’s the [opposite] (   )? 

[partialism]

Partialism

hhh

So, there’s partialism embedded within magical realism.

Oh

(2)

We’re getting there. Before (name of teacher aide).

Yes. If you want the context of this, to write in the margins, just to note for later, this is the Cold War.

So, we were beginning with the European (   ) discovery, and Colonialism, and the problems with that, and we built with, what you said student #9, to something even worse. With these legendary things were bad enough, and now we have some really current scare stuff and that is (0.8) our US intervention, because the Cold War, because the communist, their communism.
Instead of answering, student #9 asks (line 6) a yes-no question (Q2) (“Uh, is this whole communist, intro, introduction thing?”). Student #9’s question is related to Q1 because he asks about a possible political context that the speech evoked. The student’s question perhaps arose because some Latin-American historical facts listed in the speech, such as the dictatorships, related to the Cold War.

Teacher B first responds (line 7) with a feedback act that evaluates the content of the student’s question as a “nice” interpretation. By first evaluating the student’s question, teacher B may transmit to the students that their questions are valuable contributions for classroom talk. Then, teacher B answers the student’s question with a “yes” (A2). At the fourth position (lines 8-10), student #9 answers (A1) the teacher’s question (Q1) since student #9 offers an interpretation of García Marquéz’s intentions in the speech and seems to start to formulate an argument by mentioning the author’s description of real and awful facts that occurred in many Latin America countries. Teacher B treats (line 11) student #9’s previous turn as a developing answer (A1) since she does not end the student’s turn and utters a continuer (“yes”), allowing student #9 to get another turn. Thus, student #9 further develops (lines 12-13) his answer by formulating an argument in a more structured way, by arguing that the author was contrasting the reality of awful Latin-American historical facts to the ones within Magical Realism literature.

However, teacher B interrupts (line 14) the student’s turn when he was about to add another idea. Specifically, teacher B asks a further question [“What is the opposite (   )?”] to develop the topic “Opposite to Magical Realism,” which was initiated by the student. This act of asking a subsequent question after a recipient’s response is known as chaining (Mishler 1975). According to Mishler (1975, 99; 106), chaining occurs when the questioner who initiated an interaction with a recipient maintains control of the interaction by asking a further question(s).

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52 Based on an analysis conducted in first-grade classrooms, Elliot Mishler (1975, 107) argues that, when teachers initiate interactions with students, teachers employ higher rates of chaining (84%) compared to students. These high rates indicate the teachers’ tendency to control the interactions after the students’ answers by issuing further questions. Conversely, as Mishler demonstrates, students’ arching (asking a question after a teacher’s question) are less likely to occur (30%) in teacher-initiated interactions. This lower rate indicates that students are less likely to counter-control interactions initiated by the teacher. However, Mishler (1975, 107) demonstrates that, when students initiate the interaction with teachers, students tend to employ higher rates of chaining to keep control of (67%) the
Afterwards, student #9 answers teacher B’s question (line 15) in a latched talk with the teacher’s question, showing his engagement in answering the teacher’s question. Also, in a latched talk, teacher B issues feedback to his answer, by repeating his answer, “partialism.”

In a later feedback act (“We are getting there,” on line 21), teacher B communicates that her question (Q1) has not been fully answered yet. However, teacher B acknowledges (lines 22-23) the relevance of student #9’s question, by informing the class that the Nobel Prize speech was written within the “Cold War” context and that students can write this information in the margin of their readings. Teacher B also acknowledges that the student’s reply (lines 8-10 and 12-13) had information that addressed her question (line 25-26).

This passage demonstrates a situation in which the teacher explored a students’ question within the context of a larger question posed by her. The passage also shows how a student’s inserted question may further contribute to the understanding of a text. As discussed in chapter 2, a competent participation (Mehan 1979) in formal classroom presupposes the appropriate delivery of academic knowledge. Note that student #9’s academic knowledge was not provided in a standard form since a question is technically speaking not an answer. This way of acting seems to be acceptable in classroom B talk since teacher B answered and evaluated the student’s question. Chapter 2 discussed that some students may feel more comfortable asking questions and contributing with knowledge that they possessed when the floor is open for students’ initiations (Oyler 1996) or, perhaps, when the floor is less tightly controlled by the teacher. In this case, student #9’s question came in a non-standard format and with knowledge that provided further information about the Nobel Prize speech.

interaction. However, according to Mishler (1975, 107), teachers employ higher rates of arching (78%) to regain control of the interaction in these student-initiated interactions.
2. Deviant Cases

In classroom B, the majority of inserted-question sequences audio recorded were actually deviant cases of the genuine-insertion sequence as presented above. In this analysis, the deviant cases are presented in terms of their variations at the third and fourth positions of the genuine-insertion sequence.

a. Variations at the Third Position

Most of the inserted-question sequences (11 cases) had some type of variation in terms of the teacher’s actions performed at the third position other than just an answer, such as the following: an answer and a question (A2 and Q3); a question (Q3); a response and a question (R2 and Q3); or a response (R2). The analysis below addresses some of these variations and explains them through the light of the participants’ interactions.

i. When the Teacher Produces an A2 and Then Asks a Q3

This variation encompassed two cases in the data. It describes situations in which the teacher performed at least two actions in the third position: the teacher answers (A2) a student’s question (Q2), then the teacher asks a subsequent question (Q3) that is a version of her first question (Q1). The data shows that in this type of inserted-question sequence the same student (S1) or a different student (S2) can be the actor occupying the fourth position. The scheme below illustrates this type of inserted-question sequence:

T: Q1 FPP1
S1: Q2 FPP2
T: A2 SPP2 + Q3 (=Q1)
S1/S2: A3

Excerpt 8 shows a situation in which student’s inserted question (Q2) was not related to the teacher’s question (Q1). This passage happened at the end of the class, when teacher B was starting to teach the students how to write references for their academic works. The passage is inserted in a context in which teacher B was trying to engage the students in participating in this activity (lines 2-3). The
teacher B started an IRF sequence (line 4) with the following question (Q1) addressed to the class: “What do you notice about this list so far?” (a reference to a list provided by the teacher).

Excerpt 8: [(48) TB1 p. 55 (Computer 23:44)]

1  TB:               (...)
2  Help me cite this book. This is where the introduction came from. (1)
3  Someone, take the lead (1) ((throat sound)).
4  What’s, what do you notice about this list so far?
5  →      Student #7, what’s your question?
6  →      S#7:          Uh, can I (   ) my computer (   )?
7  TB:      Yeah. Okay.
8  What do you notice about the list that I started building?
9  S:      ((the student answers))
10 TB:      Alphabetical order by last name of the author.
11        How about the punctuation?

Student #7 probably must have signaled to teacher B that she wanted to get the floor because teacher B uttered, “Student #7, what’s your question?” (line 5). With this act, teacher B put her agenda “on hold” to listen to and address student #7’s question, therefore demonstrating teacher B’s interest in the student’s question. After being granted the floor, student #7 seems to ask (line 6) permission (Q2) related to the use of a computer during that lesson. Note that student #7’s question is not related to Q1. The student’s question seemed to be procedural.

At the third position (line 7), the teacher answered (A2) the student’s question (“yeah”). But the teacher does not ask student #7 to address the question (Q1). The student’s question was not treated, at least apparently, as inconveniently placed within the sequence initiated by the teacher with her Q1. Next, in the same turn (line 7), teacher B utters the word “okay,” a word commonly used in classroom talk to signal an end of an activity and the beginning of another (also known as a boundary). This indicates that teacher B wanted to resume the “references” lesson. This is confirmed in her next action (line 8), when she asked a version of her first question, “What do you notice about the list that I started building?” (Q3).
With this action, teacher B regained control of the lesson by coming back to the topic that she wanted to develop with students. It is arguable whether Q3 constitutes a teacher’s chaining act since her question (Q1) was not answered. Also, teacher B did not pose a different question but a slightly different version of Q1. Next, at the fourth position (line 9), a student other than student #7 answered the teacher’s Q3 (Q1).

This case of a student’s inserted-question indicates that teacher B may also accommodate students’ procedural questions even when she had started a lesson. Note that student #7 also did not volunteer to respond teacher B’s question. The teacher’s question was answered by another student, which shows that students can ultimately orient their behavior to answer teacher B’s questions.

The data also show a student’s inserted-question case in which the student’s question (Q2) was related to the teacher’s question (Q1). In this case, student #8’s question was a clarification (other-initiated repair) of the teacher’s question (Q1), which was addressed to student #8. At the third position, teacher B answered the question (Q2) and re-stated her first question (Q1=Q3). This student’s inserted question was part of a longer dialogue between the teacher and student #8 that involved another inserted question asked by student #8, which is analyzed below in the next section (see discussion in excerpt 9).

**ii. When the Teacher does not Produce an A2 at the Third Position**

This variation includes all cases in which, at the third position, the teacher did not issue an answer as we have technically defined it and/or perform another act. Nine cases of students’ inserted questions fell within this category. At the third position, the data shows that the actions performed by the teacher varied. Teacher B’s actions were, for example, asking a version of the first question (Q1=Q3), asking a further question (Q3), responding to a student’s question (R2), or repairing herself on her previous talk (SR). In this analysis, I show three different types of teacher’s responses.

Excerpt 9 describes a situation in which the teacher produces a question (Q3) to a students’ question (Q2) at the third position. The student’s question was a clarification. In this case, at the third position, teacher B re-stated her first question. The scheme below illustrates how this interaction sequentially unfolded:
Excerpt 9 was withdrawn from the beginning of a class discussion about how to write the assigned essay about the book *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Before the discussion, students took turns reading quotes, which students had selected from the book, to be used in their essays. The goal was for students to use the quotes in a freewriting activity. Later, students would prepare an essay that should develop an argument and use the quotes as support for it. The discussion begins after the students had finished reading their selected quotes, when teacher B asks (line 1) the students about the purpose of writing an essay about a book.

**Excerpt 9: [(70) TB8 p. 12-13 (Did You Say How We Do 11:05)]**

1. **TB:** What is the purpose of writing (an) essay about a book?
2. (1.5)
3. **SF:** (  ) =
4. **TB:** = (  ) to understand it better [(  )]
5. **SF:** (  )[(  )]
6. **TB:** To lead your reader to understand better. But to put that together with (quotes), through walking your reader along with you as you come to understand it better, by digging into a certain aspect of it (3)
7. **→** So how do you (1) how do you write about things that, um, you take one of these quotes and, and write about it (0.5) in order to find out more?
8. (5)
9. **→** **S#8:** (Wait) did you say how we do?
10. **TB:** How did you write about a quote in a way that helps you discover more about it?
11. **S#8:** You kinda (  ) I think that (  ) you should take quotes that confuse you, or you (don’t) understand. And then kinda (1) uh, write about your thoughts, your thought process, and what you think. And you what (  ) discover (why)
12. (  ) you (take) (  ) that (quote).
13. **→** **TB:** So, what kind of things you notice? =
After two students’ answers (lines 3 and 5), teacher B adds (lines 6-8) more information about the process of writing by using quotes from the book as a way to focus on one aspect developed by the author. Then, teacher B asks (lines 9-10) a question (Q1) to probe students about how to use the quote-driven method. Note that teacher B’s question contains some repetition of words, hesitations, and pauses that may have created difficulty in the students’ understanding of the question.

Teacher B’s question was followed by a long silence (line 11). The lack of a student’s response could have signaled that the students had trouble understanding the question or that students were silently reasoning. Then, student #8 takes the floor (line 12) and asks a yes-no question (Q2), an other-initiated repair (“Did you say how we do?”), to clarify the teacher’s Q1 before attempting to answer it. As mentioned in chapter 2, this type of repair is not commonly employed by students in formal classrooms; the system of repairs in formal classrooms is skewed towards other-initiated repairs by the teacher (McHoul 1990). The student’s clarification question places the student in a position of someone who might know the answer to the teacher’s question and who exerts the right of clarification before attempting to answer the question.

An answer in the grammatical terms proposed in student #8’s question would require a “yes” or “no” answer. However, teacher B produces (lines 13-14) a response in a question form (Q3). Teacher B actually re-states her first question (Q1) by producing a clearer and more concise version of it; therefore, she provides the clarification requested in student #8’s question. The teacher’s question (Q3) does not appear to be a case of chaining because she did not ask a different question and had not yet obtained an
answer to her question (Q1). The design of the teacher’s response makes her question (Q3=Q1) more prominent in the interaction. The absence of a “yes” in the teacher’s response and the repetition of her question create an expectation for her question to be answered by student #8, since the student was the last speaker to interact with teacher B. In the next turn, at the fourth position (lines 15-18), student #8 issues a long answer to teacher B’s question (Q3).

Teacher B’s next action (line 19) is to ask a further question of student #8 (“So, what kind of things you notice?”) to probe more about the process of the quote-driven method. The teacher’s new question can be characterized as a chaining action, since teacher B is maintaining control of the development of the topic by asking a further question. However, teacher B’s new question is issued while the student was still completing her answer, which can be verified by the student’s use of the coordinating conjunction “and” (line 20). Thus, student #8 probably did not listen to the new question issued by the teacher. Hence, in the same turn, the student issues another inserted question (line 20) to clarify (another other-initiated repair) the teacher’s new question. The new student’s inserted question is constructed as a Wh-question (“What’re you saying?”). However, this student’s inserted-question sequence develops differently than the one just discussed here (see comment on section 2.a(i): When the Teacher Produces an A2 and Then Asks a Q3).

Another variation describes here is when teacher B responds (R2) to a student’s Q2 and then asks a further question (Q3). In the data, four cases of students’ inserted question unfolded in this way. The scheme below illustrates the development of this sequence:

T: Q1 FPP1
S1: Q2 FPP2
T: R2 + Q3
S1: A3

53 Note that at, the third position (lines 21-22), the teacher answers the student’s question and then repeats her new question (Q3=Q1). At the fourth position, the student attempts to answer the teacher’s new question, but the student does not conclude her utterance and issues a breathing laughter, which may indicate some discomfort for not providing a complete answer. The interaction finishes with the teacher’s warning the student to keep her number of quotes under control, perhaps as an indication that the student may have considered using many quotes in her essay.
Excerpt 10 illustrates one of these cases. The excerpt was withdrawn from a class session in which the teacher and students started to read the book *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. The sequences shown below occurred after the class had read a long passage from the book. The teacher stopped the reading and asked two questions of the students. The excerpt shown here starts after the teacher asked the second question. (The first question and its discussion are not shown here.)

**Excerpt 10: [(54) TB4 (Do We Ever Find Out Who the Narrator Is? 37:20)]**

1. TB: So, we’re kind of being transported into people’s imaginations, or their memories. And the telling of stories that were really dramatic in the past, that’s Magical Realism too.
2. 
3. 
4. → So, do you have a sense so far of the characters who have been mentioned and the narrator?
5. Any questions?
6. (4)
7. Student #1?
8. → S#1: Do we ever find out who the narrator is? (  )
9. TB: We find out a little bit more. What do you know about that so far?
10. S#1: He seems or she seems to (   ) watching, but maybe even not looking at (   ).
11. SF: ((the student asks a question))
12. TB: Yeah. They are (   ), that’s a question (   ).
13. Audio recorder off
14. TB: So, what’s the sense that you get of his relationship to the people in the story of the town?
15. 
16. 
17. 

The interaction analyzed here begins when teacher B asks (lines 4-5) the following question (Q1): “So, do you have a sense so far of the characters who have been mentioned and the narrator?” The teacher’s question seeks to examine what students know at that point about the characters and the narrator in the story. However, teacher B also decides to open the floor to any questions (line 6) that students might have related to the reading that they have conducted. Teacher B’s opening the floor after an IRF question demonstrates her openness to hear any other queries that the students might have about the book,
beyond obtaining an answer to her question.

At the second position, student #1 raises (line 9) a yes-no question (Q2): “Do we ever find out who the narrator is?” The student’s question is related to the teacher’s Q1 since the student’s question raises the question of the narrator’s identity. The question also seeks to find out whether at a certain point in the story the narrator’s identity will be revealed. The student’s action fills the two requirements requested by the teacher in the previous turn. First, the student answers teacher B’s question since the student notes in the question that the narrator’s identity has not been revealed. Second, the student designs her response as a question, which was also a possibility proposed by the teacher. The student’s ability to project a response in such a way demonstrates the student’s communicative competence (Hymes 1966) in this classroom context; the student capably designed her answer to fill all of the teacher’s requests (at the first position) and, at the same time, pursued her own learning agenda (i.e., to find out if ultimately the story would reveal the identity of the narrator).

At the third position, teacher B responds (line 10) the student’s question with the response: “We find out a little more.” The teacher does not answer the student’s question because that would require the use of a “yes” or a “no.” However, somehow teacher B is partially answering the student #1’s question because the name of the narrator is not revealed in the story of book. But teacher B does not say this. Instead, in the same turn, teacher B probes (line 11) the student by chaining with the following question: “What do you know so far?” (Q3). At the fourth position (12), student #1 replies to Q3 by offering information about the narrator, thereby closing the inserted-question sequence. This excerpt shows the teacher using the third position to partially answer a student’s question and further probe into the student’s knowledge about the book. This teacher’s type of response may indicate that the teacher may not completely answer a student’s question, with the goal of examining the students’ knowledge on a topic.

A last third-position variation showed here refers to situations in which teacher B responded (R2) to a student’s Q2. The data show two cases that unfolded in this way. The scheme below illustrates the development of this inserted-question sequence:
Excerpt 11 demonstrates this variation. The excerpt was withdrawn from a class in which students and teacher B were reading and interpreting Gabriel García Marqués’s speech, *The Solitude of Latin America*. In that activity, the teacher was reading the speech and very often pausing to ask questions of the students about the content of the speech. The sequence analyzed here began at one of the points at which the teacher paused. However, at this time, instead of the teacher’s posing a question of the students, student #1 requested the floor to ask a question (lines 7 to 9) about the text. Although the interaction analyzed in this excerpt is not focused on student #1’s question, this student’s question trigged a teacher’s question that generated a student’s inserted question (line 15), which is the focus of the present analysis. Note how this passage involved the interaction of more than one student (students #1, #8, and #4).

**Excerpt 11: [(78) TB1 II (Crux 10:28)]**

1. TB: ( . . . )
2. “This, my friends, is the very scale of our solitude.” And, so, it’s a political, geographic, misunderstood, unheard, ignored, solitude.
3. Add it to what else he is describing.
4. That’s the scale of the solitude.
5. Student #1?
6. S#1: Um, he kind of repeats, uh, repeats, uh, what he says earlier “this, my friends, is the crux of our solitude.” I wasn’t sure is that, um, is that like purposeful ( . ) repeating the meaning?
7. TB: Yeah. so, it’s a parallel structure, with differences in words. The first work is crux and the second is scale.
8. What is the difference between crux and scale?
9. (5)
10. → TB: (What did I say crux means?)
11. → S#8: Crux?
12. TB: Crux.
13. S#8: Crux means the decisive point or the most important point (of an issue).
The data shows other instances in which a student’s question, instead of receiving a response or answer, is taken by the teacher and then addressed to the class to be answered by other students. Note that this type of response was not included in the discussion of the types of responses in this chapter; this may be a response typical in classroom settings.

Student #8’s question is also an other-initiated repair. Note that she is the same student performing similar clarifications in excerpt 9.
because the student knew the meaning of only the word “crux” and wanted to eliminate the possibility of providing the meaning for the word “scale.” Student #8’s question signals that she is a possible holder of an answer of Q1 and shows that she was engaged in the discussion.

At the third position (line 16), teacher B responds (R2) to student #8’s question (Q2) by repeating the word “crux,” thus confirming that that is the word under discussion. Note that an answer to the student’s question would require a “yes” word. The teacher’s repetition of the word “crux” seems to emphasize the focus of her first question (Q1). However, teacher B does not request student #8 to answer Q1, perhaps because the question was posed to the class and so the floor was open to anyone to answer. However, at the fourth position (line 17), student #8 holds the floor to answer Q1, by defining the word “crux” (A1); thus, the student completes the inserted-question sequence.

Teacher B appears to accept the student’s definition because, in the teacher’s feedback turn (line 19), she builds up her next question based on student #8’s answer (“How/what is it different from ‘this is a scale’?”). This was the original teacher’s question (on line 12), which now is re-framed and posed to student #4, who answers (lines 20-21). Then, teacher B accepts student #4’s answer (line 22) with the word “yeah.” Note that teacher B positively evaluates (line 24) the student #1’s question as a “great question,” displaying to the students that questions, and not just answers, can be an object of teacher B’s evaluations. This excerpt also shows the collaboration of two different students to answer a question that was posed initially by student #1, with mediation by the teacher.

b. Variations at the Fourth Position

The data show three cases with variations at the fourth position. 56 In two cases, a student at the fourth position is the same student who inserted the question at the second position. 57 In the remaining case, the student who answers the teacher’s question (Q1) is a different student (S2).

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56 There were more cases in which a student at the fourth position is different from the student at the second position. These cases occurred under the third position variation analysis (see excerpt #7 for example). However, since this analysis shows how the variations occur turn by turn in comparison to a genuine-insertion sequence, the
The case analyzed here is the one that contains the same student at the fourth position. However, instead of answering the teacher’s question, the student (S1) displays a change in his state of knowledge (C). The teacher’s question (Q1) is answered by a different student (S2). The scheme below illustrates this particular sequence:

T: Q1 FPP1
S1: Q2 FPP2
T: A2 SPP2
S1: C/ SPP1 / S2: A1

Excerpt 12 occurred after a class discussion about a passage just read from the book *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Teacher B was answering students’ questions about the passage, and students were commenting on the events described in the book. The sequence begins when teacher B takes the lead of the discussion (“Okay”) and asks (line 3-4) students to explain why she had asked (Q1) them to mark a specific quote in the book (“Why did I ask you to mark that quote ‘fatality makes us invisible’?”). Teacher B is referring to a quote that she asked students to mark during a previous reading of a passage from the book. Student #9’s inserted question is introduced after teacher B asked that question.

**Excerpt 12: [(35) TB7 (Fatality 58:22)]**

1  S#8: That’s true. Never mind.  
   [These utterances were responses to another student’s comments.]
2  TB: Okay.
3 →  My question for you is why did I ask you to mark that quote “fatality makes us invisible”?
4  S#8: Oh, yes (   )
5  S#9: Well, fate, what is fatality? (Define fatality.)
6 →  TB: Fatality is death like you’re about to be killed
7  S#9: Ah
8  S#1: Maybe because, uh, (   ) kinda (   ) situation where everyone knew that he’s

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57 In one of the inserted-question sequences that unfolds in this way, the students at the fourth position seemed to be performing an action other than answering teacher B’s question (Q1). Because of overlapped talk with the teacher and other students, it is not possible to decipher what the student said.
At the second position, student #9 (line 6) introduces an inserted question (Q2) by asking a Wh-question (“What is fatality?”). Then, in the same turn, the student issues to teacher B an imperative directive, “Define Fatality,” which may also have had the force of a question since teacher B answers the request in the next turn. In classroom contexts, given the teacher’s institutional authority, the use of directives is normally a privilege reserved to teachers; while teachers have the institutional role of telling students to perform tasks and some actions, students are not supposed to tell teachers “what to do.” Note that the student’s directive was issued without any form of mitigation, such as, “Could you explain what this word means?,” a common strategy employed when a difference in authority or status exists between two speakers. So, in this context, the student’s directive may indicate a degree of informality in the classroom relationships and/or a closeness relationship between the student and the teacher. Additionally, student #9’s question (and directive) is related to teacher’s Q1 and makes sense. From the student’s perspective, the student first needs to learn what “fatality” is before thinking about an answer to teacher’s question (Q1).

At the third position, teacher B provides (line 7) a definition of the word, thus answering the student’s question (A2). Interestingly, teacher B does not display discomfort in being told what to do, because she promptly responded to the student’s request. However, the teacher’s alignment to the student’s directive should not be interpreted here as a sign of the teacher’s lack of authority in the classroom: a few seconds before the student’s question, the teacher had issued a directive, requesting student #9 to put his cell phone “out of sight,” and the student complied.

At the fourth position, student #9 displays (line 8) a change in his state of knowledge by uttering the expression “ah.” However, student #9 does not engage in answering the teacher’s question (Q1). The lack of an answer is a reasonable outcome since the student just learned what the word “fatality” meant. Teacher B also did not ask the student to answer. However, teacher B’s question did not go without an
answer. In the following turn (lines 9-10), student #1 promptly answered (A1) the teacher’s question. Next, teacher B produces a feedback action (line 11) in which she accepts student #1’s answer by uttering the word “great.” This excerpt also demonstrates that, when insertion sequences take place, more than two speakers can get involved to fulfill the expectation of completing an insertion sequence. Even though teacher B’s question did not receive an answer by the student who inserted a question, another student oriented herself to answer teacher B’s question.

**J. Student’s Inserted Question in a Student-Teacher Conversation**

In this section, I analyze a case in which a student’s inserted question appears during a conversation between the teacher and a student. In this case, the teacher’s question was not an IRF-type question. The student’s inserted question was also followed by another student’s question (see the scheme of this variation of the *insertion sequence* discussed above). The scheme below illustrates this particular interaction between the teacher and the student:

- T: Q1 (FPP1)
- S1: Q2 (FPP2)
- T: A2 (SPP2)
- S1: Q3 (FPP3)
- T: A3 (SPP3)
- S1: R1 (SPP1)

The passage shows student #9 negotiating a teacher’s suggestion for the student’s assignment. Excerpt 13 occurred after class discussion of a passage from Gabriel Marquéz’s Nobel Prize speech.

The interaction studied in this analysis begins with what appears to be student #9’s interpretation of a passage from the speech (lines 3-6). Although the audio recording of the student’s interpretation is not completely clear, the student was probably referring to García Marquéz’s historical accounts of a series of tragedies, such as wars and military coups, that occurred in Latin American countries. Student #9’s inserted question is introduced after teacher B had suggested that the student use that interpretation in his essay (an essay that students were preparing to turn in).

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58 Note that the audio recorder was turned on after the student had initiated his comment.
Excerpt 13: [(6) TB1-II pp. 49-50 (Which One 17:12)]

1  Ss:  ((talk at the same time))
2  TB:  No. It was before.
3  ((Audio recorder off))
4  S#9:  ( ) that seems ( ) that life is not as valued yet each person ( ) ( ) but
5  they are, are a person who can achieve something ( ) one of those people
6  who looks down on (4) and ( ) that.
7  (3)
8  →  TB1:  Can you get at that in your essay, in terms of the essay right now? ( )
9  →  S#9:  Which one? =
10  TB:  = The one you’re talking about. I’m looking at this. ( ) looking ( ) place
11  that fit in that piece of writing because I’m feeling like you’re in a spot
12  where you’re putting things together.
13  S#9:  You mean ( ) the essay I’m writing?
14  TB:  Yeah. (1.5) Like grab it. Try to articulate it.
15  This is just, really quickly for your notes because I wanna project.
16  S#9:  I hate that idea.
17  (1)
18  TB:  Okay. You don’t have to.
19  Where does Magical Realism come from? I put this in dots because he
20  doesn’t talk about (...)

At the first position, teacher B asks (line 8) a question of student #9 (“Can you get at that in your essay, in terms of the essay right now?”). Teacher B’s request is issued in a mitigated way, i.e., by asking the student to use his interpretations in an essay that students were writing. This teacher’s question is known as an interrogative directive (Holmes 1893), normally used by teachers to ask students to do something other than “say something” (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975, 50). J. McH. Sinclair and R. M. Coulthard (1975, 50) argue that, in a case of a teacher’s directive, a student’s response is “compulsory,” because of the institutional relationship between teacher and students in which a teacher has the role of laying out tasks and giving directions. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) point out that, even though students
do not “always do what they are told,” teachers’ directives “imply that the teacher has the right to expect
the pupil to do so” (50).

However, in the next turn (line 9), student #9 did not answer the teacher’s question, i.e., he did
not answer whether he would follow the teacher’s directive. Instead, he asks an inserted question (Q2),
using the phrasal form “which one?,” thus seeking clarification (also an other-initiated repair) about
which essay the teacher referred to. At the third position (line 10), teacher B promptly (latched talk with
student’s question) answers (A2) the student’s question, by clarifying that the essay under discussion is
the one that the student was talking about. In the same turn (lines 10-11), teacher B also justifies her
request from the student.

In the next turn (line 13), student #9 asks a subsequent question (Q3), which is a chaining act, that
requests further clarification about which essay the teacher was referring to. This time the student uses a
declarative question with a rising intonation at the end [“You mean (   ) the essay I’m writing?”]. In the
next turn (line 14), teacher B answers (A3) the student’s question. Then, in the same turn, teacher B issues
two imperative directives, telling the student to “grab” and “articulate” his interpretation in his essay.
Then, the teacher addresses (line 15) the class, changing the topic of the conversation.

Next, the student gets the floor (line 16) and completes the inserted-question sequence by
responding to (R1), and not answering, teacher B’s question (Q1) with the following statement: “I hate
that idea.” This comment was an affective response since the student displays his “negative” feeling (“I
hate”) about the teacher’s request. Note that student #9 is not answering, for an answer to the teacher’s
question would require the use of “yes” or “no” words. In a classroom setting, teachers’ directives can
strongly influence students’ academic decisions, since teachers also have authority due to their
knowledge. However, student #9’s response does not indicate the student’s decision on whether he will
follow the teacher’s directives, but it indicates an affective opposition to teacher B’s request. This
student’s response probably should be interpreted within a context of informality between the teacher-
student exchanges.
The informality between the teacher-student exchanges can be confirmed by the teacher’s response (line 18) to the student’s opposition. After a brief silence (line 17), the teacher says, “Okay. You don’t have to,” therefore telling the student that he need not follow her request.

This passage shows a student displaying affective opposition to a teacher’s directive. The outcome of the interaction indicates that in this classroom context students may have some degree of academic autonomy in the development of their work.

K. Summary

In Classroom B, students’ inserted questions performed different actions. In the analysis showed here, we saw students using inserted questions to provide knowledge during a text interpretation (excerpt 7), request permission to do something (excerpt 8), to clarify and then bid to reply to a teacher’s question (excepts 9 and 11), to answer to a teacher’s question in a way of pursing the student’s own learning agenda (excerpt 10), to request and direct teacher to give an explanation (excerpt 12), and to clarify a teacher’s directive (excerpt 13). The analysis of students’ inserted questions indicates that in general students oriented their behavior to answer the teacher’s IRF questions (at the fourth position); however, these answers could be given either by the same student who inserted the question or by a different student.

We can say that the teacher’s questions were deferred by students’ inserted questions; thus, teacher B prioritized to address the students’ inserted questions over her own questions. However, when students’ inserted questions were clarifications, the students were actually converging with teacher B’s goal to obtain an answer for her first question (Q1). The inclination of teacher B to address the students’ inserted questions in the classroom was revealed in situations such as when she opened the floor for students’ questions right after she had asked an IRF-question type (excerpt 10) or when she evaluated positively a student’s inserted question (excerpt 7).

The types of teacher’s responses found in the analysis included answering and evaluating a student’s inserted question (excerpt 7), answering by giving permission to a student to do something
(excerpt 8), responding by re-stating her previous Q1 (excerpt 9), responding and probing into a student’s knowledge (excerpt 10), responding by re-asserting her previous Q1, and answering a student’s question and directive (excerpt 12). This analysis of teacher’s action at the third position shows that the teacher’s actions vary more than just provide students with an answer to their inserted questions.

The above analysis of students’ inserted questions indicates that great part of students’ inserted questions did not unfold as predicted in a genuine-insertion sequence. Most of the variations occurred in the teacher’s turn (at the third position). In relation to the students’ fourth position, there were fewer variations, either in terms of actions or in terms of the actor occupying that position.

**Chapter 6: Discussion**

This study addresses a question of how the progressive education values that aim to promote children’s active participation and initiative in an alternative (and democratic) school were reflected in classroom communications. The analysis of classroom B communications suggests that participating students actively participated in the talk by often initiating the interaction with the teacher, mainly by asking questions during discussions about readings, a novel, lectures, and explanations of assignments. The presence of a specific type of interaction, the students’ inserted questions, corroborates the students’ active participation in classroom B.

As discussed in chapter 5, questions are conversation devices that exert high control in a conversation because they select conversation topics to be addressed next by the addressee (Clemente 2015) and narrow the options of actions to be performed by the addressee in the next turn (Boyd and Heritage 2006). In classroom B, the frequency of students’ questions suggests a degree of control of the students in their own learning given teacher B’s general orientation to address those students’ questions.

The high frequency of students’ questions, and particularly the presence of students’ inserted questions, suggests a degree of symmetry in the social organization of the classroom B talk. As discussed in chapter 5, institutional asymmetries between participants in diverse types of organizations, including schools, are maintained through interactions regulated by a *pre-allocation system*, which operates with a
sort of “restriction of one party to asking questions and the other to responding to them” (Heritage and Clayman 2010, 37). The analysis of classroom B talk indicates that students were not restricted to answering teacher B’s questions. Even though teacher B had the institutional role of conducting the classroom discussions (mainly using IRF sequences and managing the use of the floor), the students asked questions by either being invited to ask questions or posing questions without being requested by the teacher. Additionally, students were also observed obtaining the floor without bidding to ask a question or to comment (see analysis on pages 57-58). In this way, the pre-allocation system of classroom B seemed to be operating in a more flexible fashion.

The presence of students’ inserted questions (or arching) suggests some degree of equality in institutional relationships between teacher and the students. As discussed in chapter 5, this type of sequence is not commonly used by students in classroom talk, and the presence of this type of questions in discourse is considered an indicator of “relative equality in discourse” (Wood and Wood 1984) or of “equality between speakers” (Mishler 1975). Thus, the presence of participating students’ inserted questions suggests a degree of students’ leverage during classroom discussions since teacher B prioritized to address the students’ inserted questions over her first IRF questions. This also suggests that the IRF sequence is used flexibly in classroom B.

The analysis of certain types of students’ initiations also demonstrates some degree of equality in classroom discourse. As mentioned in chapter 5, the data shows other types of students’ initiations that were not described in Oyler’s (1986) initiation typology, such as agreeing/disagreeing with the teacher and repairing the teacher. The disagreeing with the teacher initiations demonstrate that students could openly express their disagreement with, for example, the teacher’s opinions, interpretations, or suggestions. Also, the analysis of a student’s pre-disagreement initiation shows that a student could challenge and argue about a teacher’s concept for an essay assignment. These initiations indicate an opening in classroom B talk for students to express their own arguments, thoughts, or opinions that may contrast with the teacher’s. Note that, in general, students may perceive teachers as authorities who possess indisputable knowledge. Thus, students are often reluctant to challenge, disagree with, or question
the teachers’ use of concepts, interpretations, or ideas. By contrast, because of their institutional role of teaching and evaluating students, teachers are more comfortable challenging students’ ideas and disagreeing with students’ interpretations. Thus, the implicit rules of participation in the classroom B talk seemed to include “the right” of a student to disagree with or challenge the teacher.

Some cases of students’ inserted questions also suggest that students could exert some institutional power in their interactions with the teacher. For example, in excerpt 12, student #9 issues a directive, without using any mitigation form, to the teacher define a word; and, the teacher answered without displaying discomfort with the student’s directive. Or, in excerpt 13, the same student utters his dissatisfaction with teacher’s directives, therefore negotiating a different outcome; and the teacher reviewed her directive letting, the student to choose. These interactional sequences (excerpts 12 and 13) apparently reflect the school’s libertarian orientation, as the staff member discussed in his interview (see discussion at the end of chapter 4). According to the staff member, this orientation seeks to have students develop internal motivation for learning rather than focus on students’ compliance. Therefore, teacher B’s natural reaction to a student’s non-mitigated directive and her openness to negotiate with the student a different outcome for her directive seem to be in accordance with the school’s libertarian culture.

The presence of students’ initiations in classroom B suggests that alternative classrooms may vary in styles of teaching and interactions between teacher and students. As discussed in chapter 2, Alexander’s (2005) study described a prevalence of a specific style of IRF sequence, the pseudo-inquiry script (as he termed it), in British and American schools influenced by progressive education. According to Alexander (2005, 03), the pseudo-inquiry script is characterized by a succession of "unfocused" and "unchallenged" teachers’ open questions, after which the teacher provides positive but non-specific feedback to students’ responses. Even though the present study did not specifically address the analysis of the use of IRF sequences by the teacher to deliver the lessons, the high frequency of students’ questions in the classroom A and B talk indicates that other type of interactions (i.e., student’s question – teacher’s answer: Q-A sequence) take place in these settings.
The presented characterization of the classroom B talk includes the high frequency of participating students’ questions, their inserted questions, the teacher’s opening the floor for students’ questions, and the teacher’s general orientation to address the students’ questions. These communicative practices found in classroom B suggest that classroom B talk reflected the school’s culture, which values students’ active participation in school affairs and classrooms.

As discussed in chapter 4, this value is literally expressed in the school curriculum regarding the promotion of the “initiative habit,” which tells students to ask questions and participate in classrooms and school activities. The school has structures and processes for students to practice the skills related to the initiative habit, such as ASM, the committees, and the family groups. Teacher B also demonstrated alignment with these school values since she commented in the interview that she encourages students to ask more questions in the classroom instead of asking all the questions. (Similarly, teacher A designed her curriculum in classroom A to teach students to ask questions related to Geology.) Regarding the students’ “skill habit” of asking questions, in the second interview, teacher A mentioned (see chapter 4) that asking questions of teachers in the classroom was taken for granted by alumni students. Teacher A explained that alumni students often report that, compared with other college students, they were comfortable asking questions of their college professors. This may suggest that, in general, students at the school are socialized to ask questions of the teachers and feel comfortable doing this.

The frequency of students’ questions is most likely connected to the school curriculum, its structures and processes, and the teachers’ alignment with the school’s ideology. Other variables could also have favored students’ active participation and cross discussion among students in classroom B, such as the classroom arrangement. As described in chapter 5, the layout of classroom B favored a non-hierarchical arrangement since the tables were placed in a circular arrangement in which most students were facing each other. This layout contrasts with traditional classroom arrangements, in which all students are arranged to face the teacher. Even though the teacher was often observed standing in front of the circular arrangement of the tables, she also sat side by side with students on tables.
The closer and more informal relationships between teachers and students may favor students’ participation in classroom talk. As mentioned in chapter 4, both participating teachers commented that their relationships with the students were affected by fact that they do activities together with the students in family groups and committees. Teacher A, for example, commented that doing activities together with students outside of her classroom helps students to see her as a common person. Conducting activities together with students in other spaces of the school (or outside, such as at school trips), as teacher A explained (see chapter 4), may diminish hierarchical distance between teachers and students in the classrooms and therefore place students at ease to ask questions or comment during lessons.

However, as pointed out in chapter 5, students’ participation in classroom B talk was not homogenous. For example, a small group of students was observed not participating very often in the classroom talk during the period of data collection. Moreover, among the participating students, some students participated in classroom discussion more often than others. For example, one particular student, student #9, stood out in the number of student initiations when compared to all students in classroom B. Therefore, the opening of the floor for students’ initiations does not guarantee that all students will initiate interactions with the teacher or that students will evenly participate. Even though the opening of the floor does not lead to uniform student initiations, the student access to it may contribute to students’ learning a topic in depth. As discussed in chapter 2, Waring’s (2009) study suggests that that Q-A (Question-Answers) sequences initiated by students created opportunities for students to learn in depth a topic previously explored through IRF sequences by the teacher.

Regarding other courses, teacher B commented on the differences in students’ participation in classroom talk and raised different factors such as circumstantial situations (like being sleepy); group dynamic; age of students; personality attributes; or even the students’ willingness to participate in classroom dialogues with the teacher and other students. Other reasons, not mentioned by the teachers, could relate to some students’ lack of interest in a specific subject matter. Additionally, as discussed in chapter 2, the social-cultural background of students plays a role in students’ participation in classroom talk. While it has been suggested that opening the floor for students’ initiations may enhance the
participation of non-mainstream children (Oyler 1996), this may not hold true for all students. Philips’s (1970) study on American-Indian children of the Warm Springs reservation demonstrates that those children were unlikely to participate in classroom talk when they had to speak in front of other students in a classroom. Because my study did not collect data on students’ socio-cultural backgrounds, this variable cannot be used to discuss differences in the students’ participation.

A. Implications

Some of this study’s findings have theoretical implications for classroom discourse, classroom interaction, and conversation analysis. In general, the findings of this study contribute to understanding students’ interactions in classrooms. Up to date, as far as I know, few studies address students’ initiations in classrooms. Chapter 2 mentioned two studies on students’ initiations: Oyler’s (1996) study of the typology of students’ initiations and Waring’s (2009) analysis of the circumstances during a classroom lesson that led a series of students’ questions. Regarding Oyler’s study, this study extends the previous typology of students’ initiation by adding other functions of student’s initiations (disagreeing and agreeing with the teacher and repairing the teacher) and confirms that opening the classroom floor increases the number of student initiations.

Regarding Waring’s study, this study demonstrates that students may also ask questions within an IRF sequence. As discussed in chapter 2, the literature points out that, when students ask questions, students tend to do that at certain points (or “junctures”) of an interactional sequence, i.e., after an IRF sequence and not at another student’s turn or at the teacher’s turn (Mehan 1979; Waring 2009). The literature indicates that, after a teacher’s question, students often answer a teacher’s IRF question. However, the presence of students’ inserted questions in classroom B demonstrates that students can ask questions right after the teacher’s IRF question. Even though in these cases students were using the right moment to talk, they were conducting an action other than answering a teacher’s IRF question.

Even though the presence of students’ inserted questions appears to deviate from what has been described in the literature, the analysis of students’ inserted questions indicates that these students’
behavior was not treated as an infraction of the rules of participation in that classroom. This assertion is supported by the fact that, in general, teacher B oriented her behavior to address the students’ inserted questions by answering, responding, or probing after a student’s inserted question even when a student’s inserted question was not related to her IRF question (see excerpt 8). In addition, the teacher was observed uttering a positive assessment after a student’s inserted-question (see excerpt 7). Another fact that sustains this assertion is that the teacher was observed opening the floor for students’ questions right after she had posed an IRF question to the class (see excerpt 10). This may have signaled to the students that they can ask a question after a teacher’s IRF question. Therefore, the presence of students’ inserted questions and the orientation of the teacher to address these questions suggest that the rules of social interaction in classroom B included the possibility of students’ asking questions after a teacher’s question.

In relation to CA literature on insertion sequences, this study suggests that, in a classroom context, when an insertion sequence takes place, the participants’ actions may often vary from a genuine-insertion sequence. As discussed in chapter 5, adjacency pairs and their variations, such as insertion sequences, are not an invariable organization of a sequence of action, but organizations of the conduct by which most speakers orient their behavior (Heritage 1984, 252). However, the organization of actions of the students’ insertion sequence in classroom B talk seemed to vary more than would be expected when compared to ordinary conversations. Only two cases (out of 17 cases) of students’ inserted questions followed a typical organization of actions of a genuine-insertion sequence in classroom B. The findings suggest that, in classroom contexts, when insertion sequences take place, the teacher’s and students’ actions may vary in response to their respective institutional roles.

For example, the data show a case in which a student did not receive a straight answer for an inserted question because, at the third position, the teacher probed the student instead (see excerpt 10). Conversely, the data show, for example, a situation in which a student, who received a teacher’s answer for an inserted question, did not, at the fourth position, answer the teacher’s IRF question because, perhaps, the teacher’s question was posed to the class and not to the individual student, the student did not
have time to formulate an answer, or the student did not know the answer. In this case, a student who was not involved in the inserted-question sequence answered for the teacher’s IRF question (see excerpt 12).

The analysis of the students’ inserted-questions sequences shows that a great part of the variations in relation to the genuine-insertion sequence occurred at the teacher’s third position (11 cases of a total of 17). This indicates that teacher B’s actions varied more than the students’ actions at the fourth position. This discrepancy in terms of variation of actions between the teacher and the students seems to relate to the teacher’s institutional roles of classroom leader in conducting the discussions and of evaluator of the students. However, this last assertion has to be weighed against the fact that students exerted some influence in the classroom talk because they often asked question of the teacher and particularly because students adopted the inserted questions format to interact with their teacher.

Other implications of this study are related to the fields of language socialization, anthropology of education, linguistic anthropology, and language ideology. As to the field of language socialization, this study contributes by describing a model of education that socializes students to take an initiative role in classroom talk and in school affairs. More specifically, the study describes how communicative practices in the classroom could be understood through the school’s ideology, structures, and processes.

As to the field of anthropology of education, this study describes a different model of education in a specific classroom context, thereby enlarging the universe of descriptions of educational practices. As discussed in Chapter 2, anthropologists of education have requested that researchers study school culture by focusing on “the organization of people’s everyday interactions in concrete contexts” (Pollock 2008, 369). In this way, this study focuses on a set of singular elements found in communicative practices in a classroom and examines them in relation to the school’s democratic and progressive culture.

As to linguistic anthropology and its related field, language ideology, this study contributes by exploring the four aspects of language that are objects of concern of linguistic anthropology, which are, as mentioned in chapter 2, form, use, ideology, and domain (Wortham 2008a, 40). The study describes and focuses on one linguistic form (questions), used by participating students in the classrooms (students’ questions). The study examines this form, and students’ classroom use of it, in relation to the school’s
ideology, which, within a specific cultural domain (a democratic and progressive school), values students’ initiative (“initiative habit”).

B. Limitations

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to other alternative school classrooms. The CA-based discourse analysis adopted in this study does not allow broad generalizations since it is rooted in the context in which the interactions occurred. This context was first defined by the specifics of the interactions in classroom B, i.e., the teacher’s style of teaching, the students’ specific ways of participating, the classroom activities adopted by the teacher, the subject matter, and the settings. A second and larger context was defined by the particularities of this school, such as their specific school structures (such as ASM or committees), the school’s specific beliefs system, and its curriculum.

In relation to other classrooms at the school, it is not possible to assert whether students’ propensity of initiating interaction with and asking questions (or inserted questions) of teacher B could also be found. However, a preliminary analysis of classroom A communications confirms a high frequency of student questions (as in classroom B), which suggests that students’ active participation in classroom discussions may occur in other classrooms of the school.

C. Future Research

Given a shortage of studies on students’ initiation in classrooms, future research that extends this study to students’ initiations in this school or similar schools may advance the understanding of the dynamics involving students’ initiations, and particularly students’ questions, in classroom talk. Future research could also investigate in more detail the circumstances in which students’ initiations arise, the type of students’ initiations, and the ways in which teachers respond to students’ initiations. The identification of teachers’ strategies to manage classroom talk and the teachers’ difficulties in controlling the floor in these classroom settings could also be addressed.
A future research would also benefit if a larger sample of students could be studied. Thus, a more accurate account of the nuances of students’ participation in classroom talk could be obtained. Also, a larger sample of students would facilitate the audio recording of communications in a classroom, therefore avoiding recordings with many segmented parts and facilitating the researcher’s comprehension of the flow of interactions during a lesson.

A fuller understanding of the factors that promote students’ questions and initiations in classrooms could be obtained by interviewing students, thereby accessing their perspectives on the school’s ideology and their motivations for actively participating in classroom talk.

**Chapter 7: Conclusions**

This study adopted an ethnographic approach and CA-based discourse analysis to investigate the following research question: How do communicative practices in an alternative school classroom reflect a democratic and progressive school's values of children's active participation and children's initiated courses of action?

In relation to the research question, the conclusions of this study are as follows:

1) The participating students in classroom A and B often initiated the interaction with their respective teachers.

2) The high frequency of students’ questions in classrooms A and B suggests a student-question driven learning approach in the communicative practices of these classrooms.

3) The participating students’ questions, inserted questions, and other initiations in classroom B seemingly are in consonance with the school’s culture, system of beliefs, and its curriculum.

4) The participating students’ questions (and inserted questions) and teacher B’s respective responses to these questions suggest that participating students exerted a degree of control over their learning.

5) The social relations between teacher B and participating students suggest some symmetry in the teacher’s and the students’ interactions since the analysis of the classroom B talk contained
the following elements: high frequency of students’ questions; the presence of students’ inserted questions; and certain types of students’ initiation, such as disagreeing with and repairing the teacher.

6) Even though participating students very often initiated the interaction with the teacher, students’ participation in classroom B talk was not homogenous among the participating students and students in general. Students’ active participation in classroom talk seems to be influenced by factors other than just the opening of the floor, such as interest in the subject, cultural background, or personality attributes.

7) Communicative practices in classroom B were characterized by a flexible use of IRF sequences that very often allowed students to access the floor to initiate an interaction with the teacher mainly to ask questions during classroom discussions.

In relation to the discussed literature and theory in this study, the main conclusions are as follows:

1) Other types of students’ initiations may occur in classroom talk in addition to those previously described in the literature (Oyler 1996), such as disagreeing or repairing the teacher.

2) The rules of social interaction in an alternative classroom seemed to include the ‘right’ to ask questions after a teacher’s IRF question. This finding adds new information about Classroom Interaction, which has demonstrated that students tend to accommodate their questions at certain junctures of IRF sequences, that is, after the teacher’s feedback act (the third turn) or at the end of a classroom activity (Mehan 1979; Waring 2009). The finding suggests that IRF sequences may operate more flexibly in alternative-classroom contexts, i.e., allowing students to perform actions other than only answering after a teacher’s IRF-question.

3) This study suggests that the pre-allocation rules (Heritage and Clayman 2010) of classroom talk in classroom B operated in a more flexible way. Also, students often obtained the floor to ask questions, sometimes informally, i.e., without bidding for the use of the floor.

4) The analysis of the participating students’ inserted questions in the classroom suggests that the organization of actions of the insertion sequences in classroom contexts may vary more often than
expected when compared to that used in ordinary conversations. As explained in chapter 5, when an inserted question is asked, the participants in the conversation often orient their actions according to the organization of actions of the insertion sequence (Heritage 1984, 251). The analysis shows that, in the 17 cases of inserted questions analyzed, only two follow the organization of actions of the insertion sequence (termed in the analysis as genuine-insertion sequences). Most of the variations of the actions were found at the teacher’s third position (11 cases). This variation of the actions in the inserted-questions sequences seems to relate to differences in the respective institutional roles of the teacher and students. Because of the teacher’s institutional role as leader of classroom discussions and examiner of students, at the third position the teacher was in the position to do more than just answer a student’s inserted question; the teacher could answer a student’s question and ask a version of her first question (see excerpt 8) or just respond and probe a student to obtain more detailed information (see excerpt 10). On the other hand, there were fewer cases of inserted questions with variations at the students’ fourth position. This may have been because students were more often restricted to answering a teacher’s question (Q1). However, there was a case in which a student performed an action other than answering the teacher’s question (Q1) (see excerpt 12).

In conclusion, this study suggests that alternative-classroom communicative practices may not be fully restricted to the use of IRF sequences, given the high number of students’ initiated Q-A sequences in classrooms A and B. The study also found a more flexible approach to the use of IRF sequences in a classroom: there was a set of cases of students’ inserted questions after the teacher’s IRF-questions. The presence of students’ inserted sequences in the studied classroom suggests that students held some rights in choosing how to response to the teacher’s questions since these students did not provide an answer at the IRF’s second position. The analysis of the students’ inserted questions and the respective teacher’s responses revealed that the students actively control their learning agenda by performing different actions, such as adding knowledge to a classroom discussion (excerpt 7); clarifying before answering a teacher’s
question or directive (excerpts 9 and 13, respectively); answering a question by asking another question to obtain more information from the teacher (excerpt 10); and requesting and directing the teacher to give an explanation (excerpt 12).
Appendices

Appendix A: Complete List of the System of Beliefs of the School

Appendix B: Transcription Symbols
Appendix A: Complete List of the System of Beliefs of the School

Below are the school’s statements of beliefs as they appear in the school document (2016-2017 academic year). These statements are followed by a paragraph that explains the school’s teaching of these beliefs.

(1) “We believe we have a responsibility to promote a broader world view and a positive change by the way we design our curriculum and prepare our students for learning throughout their lives.”

(2) “We believe in the importance of each individual student.”

(3) “We believe in encouraging students to use freedom responsibly, and to make educational choices appropriate to their individual levels of development.”

(4) “We believe in providing for the needs of a diverse population of students, and students of all abilities.”

(5) “We believe in being a fair, caring, community-run school with respectful consciousness of all minorities.”

(6) “We believe each student can excel through self-discipline, community support, and respect for people of all ages as educators and fellow learners.”

(7) “We believe that learning can be of value to students in their present lives, not just for the future, and that students have a place in, and can make contributions to their society.”

(8) “We believe the affective and creative aspects of learning are as valuable as objective and conceptual learning.”

(9) “We believe, as a caring community, we will be concerned about recycling, reusing, composting, conserving energy, and feeding ourselves with locally-grown food.”

“By acting on these beliefs and ideals, we can enable our children to deal positively with change and to contribute constructively both socially and politically to our society.”
Appendix B: Transcription Conventions

Glossary of Symbols

TB: teacher B
S #1, . . . #9: Student #1 . . . #9
SF1, SF2, SF3: non-participating female student
SM1, SM2, SM3: non-participating male student
Ss: two or more students

[   ]   Square brackets indicate a stretch of overlapped utterances involving two or more speakers.
[               ]   Left bracket indicates the onset of the overlapping speech.
]   Right bracket indicates the end of the overlapping speech.

=   Equal signs indicate that there is no gap or break in time between consecutive turns of two different speakers (mentioned in an analysis as ‘latched talk’).

(   )   A dot in side parentheses indicates a very short interval within an utterance.

(0.5)   Numbers in parentheses indicate silence. The time is represented in tenths of seconds.

hh   Two or more letters “h” indicates an aspiration. The more “h’s,” the longer the aspiration. The symbol may also signal laughter or breathing.

(()   Double parentheses indicate a description of events, such as a ((cough)), ((door closing)), or ((non-participating student’s response))

(   )   Empty parentheses indicate an indecipherable stretch of speech. It can vary from a single word to a long utterance.

( . . )   Parentheses with ellipsis indicate audible utterances that are not shown in the transcript.

(word)   A word inside the parentheses indicates a possible guess about what a speaker said. Two words separated by a slash indicate two possible guesses.

::   Colons indicate a stretched sound. The number of colons indicates the length of the stretch.

word   Underscoring indicates some stress or emphasis in the delivery of the word or part of the word.
References


XIV