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Building the Foundations of Dialogic Pedagogy with Five- and Six-Year-Olds

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Abstract: Dialogic pedagogy has been explored by researchers at length in the 21st century. Focusing on the interactions between teachers and children and the underlying epistemological values that these interactions signal, a growing body of research has identified features of dialogic classrooms and conducted fine-tuned analysis of dialogic functions in classroom talk. Much of this research features classes of older primary learners. However, the foundations of dialogic pedagogy lie in early learning contexts. This article considers how teachers enact dialogic values with young learners (five- to six-year-olds) in discussions where they are invited to share their ideas in response to visual texts that provoke philosophical thinking about social responsibility and living together. The research uses linguistic ethnography to analyse the language of these interactions at macro-, meso- and micro-levels, and detailed extracts from the lessons are included to demonstrate different dialogic strategies that teachers employ. Dialogic chains of four or more turns are analysed in detail, as representative of extended interactions that move beyond simple and traditional classroom interaction structures. The findings highlight core dialogic principles of meaning-making and relating as fundamental to the success of the interactions with young children.

Keywords: dialogic pedagogy; early years education; classroom interaction; linguistic ethnography

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1. Introduction

An exciting body of work is now established in the field of dialogic pedagogy. With its foundations in theory from seminal educationalists such as Dewey (1933) and Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987), the latter part of the 20th century saw attention turn to the nature of classroom interactions (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) and how teachers could support learning through extended exchanges with children and through including them more dynamically in their learning (Nystrand et al., 1997; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Taking a sociocultural perspective, the context of the learning itself has become a central focus in the 21st Century, with an emphasis on the type of classroom ethos conducive to this kind of pedagogy and its implications for how children and teachers engage with each other (Alexander, 2020; Aukerman & Boyd, 2020). Whilst a considerable number of the studies investigating dialogic pedagogy have focused on primary or elementary education, the role of teachers in earlier learning environments has not generally been discussed as dialogic per se. That said, research into early years pedagogy has clearly highlighted the importance of interactions between teachers and children in learning and an environment where children can develop as independent, playful and collaborative thinkers (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004; Sylva et al., 2004).

This article considers how teachers enact dialogic values with young learners (five- to six-year-olds) in discussions where they are invited to share their ideas in response to visual texts that provoke philosophical thinking about social responsibility and living together (DIALLS, 2021a). It aims to unpack the nuance of how teachers of this age group encourage dialogic interactions, comparing this to the established features of dialogic learning in older age groups. As such, it centralises the importance of carefully considered responses by teachers as they work with children to explore their ideas and encourage them to listen to and engage with those of others. Using data gathered previously from a large Horizon-funded project (European Commission, 2021), the study employs linguistic ethnographic methodologies to analyse the language of teachers and young children as they talk together in whole-class learning contexts. It seeks further understanding of the subtle approaches that skilled teachers take as they demonstrate the value that they give to the contributions of young children to whole-class discussions.

1.1. Value-Oriented Dialogic Pedagogy

Dialogic pedagogy can be described as an approach to teaching and learning that is driven by the importance of talk and language to communicate, share and co-construct ideas. In the literature, it is arguably quite inconsistently defined (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019), with much emphasis for some researchers on the quality of interactive moves between teachers and children (Hardman, 2019; Howe et al., 2019; Nystrand et al., 1997) while others focus more on dialogic principles and values (Alexander, 2020; Aukerman & Boyd, 2020). Many of the former studies focus on the educational effectiveness of dialogue. For example, a review of studies concerning dialogic interactions in the classroom by Howe et al. (2019) found that there were five key principles highlighted in most definitions of effective dialogic teaching, including the use of open questions and opportunities for learners to elaborate on and give extended responses. Other influential work has focused on the high value of reasoning through talk (Mercer et al., 1999; Soter et al., 2008) and how professional development programmes for teachers that focus on supporting reflective, sustained dialogic pedagogy might impact learning (Hardman, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2017).

However, other researchers have focused on the holistic values of a dialogical approach. Alexander (2008) highlighted the environment and ethos needed for such learning to occur, and in more recent work he has examined the ontological foundations for dialogic pedagogy (Alexander, 2020). The emphasis on values has similarly been picked up by Aukerman and Boyd (2020), who in their consideration of studies of dialogic classrooms, noted three different dialogic value orientations, towards thinking, language or relationships. These value-led approaches are more closely aligned with the philosophical origins of considering dialogue as a way of being together. For example, Bakhtin describes the infinite nature of dialogue as culturally situated and bound with response always implied (Bakhtin, 1981), while Buber's work highlights the relational stance of genuine dialogue, which is inclusive and empathetic (Buber, 1947, 2004). The importance of relating to other speakers is central in these ideas with Buber describing an "I-thou" relationship (Buber, 2004) as the key to genuine dialogue. This is also a recognised feature of an effective early learning pedagogy which champions, "warm, interactive relationships" (Sylva et al., 2004, p. 1) between teachers and children, signalling an alignment to a dialogic philosophy.

1.2. Interaction in Early Childhood Classrooms

Before addressing research that has examined the nature of interactive relationships in classrooms for younger learners, it is important to clarify exactly which age group is being addressed. Because of differing policies across countries regarding statutory ages for starting school, the term "early years", can mean quite different ages for different

educational jurisdictions. Examining research studies conducted in countries around the world, the terms "early years", "early learners", "early childhood" and "pre-school" are applied variously to age groups younger than eight years old. The call for this Special Issue invited articles on "early childhood" groups from "pre-school through to Year/Grade 2". In Finland, "Early Childhood Education and Care" similarly relates to children up to seven years old, and in Cyprus, five- to six-year-olds are defined as "pre-primary".

In England, however, children enter school in Early Years Foundation Stage aged four- to five-years old, with a statutory Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (Department for Education, 2024) outlining areas of learning and development. These children then enter formal primary learning aged five to six years old. These differences are important because depending on the readership of the research, assumptions about children, the curricula and learning environments that they encounter included in the studies, might lead to very different expectations. For example, an English reader might assume Early Years children to be younger than five, but a Finnish reader might assume younger than seven, and with young children the difference of a couple of years is significant. It is, thus, important to interrogate how the terminology is being used before drawing too many comparisons between different research studies. As a result, in considering relevant studies for this article where the children are five to six years old, studies where children were younger than four (in England, "preschool" age) were discounted where they were clearly centred on early childhood and care principles and practice rather than classroom pedagogy. Instead, particular attention is given to studies of children aged between five and seven. That said, the EPPE report (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) published in England (Sylva et al., 2004) lays important ground for understanding the interaction between children and adults in Early Years settings more broadly, and with younger children. Of particular importance is the notion of sustained shared thinking described by Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) as "an interaction where two more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities or extend a narrative" (p. 718). Whilst the context for sustained shared thinking would typically be adults and children in a small group or dyadic encounter, the principle behind the shared endeavour of learning reflects the dialogic ethos espoused particularly in Alexander's work (Alexander, 2008; Alexander, 2020).

1.3. Investigating the Nature of Dialogic Interactions in Early Learning Contexts

Whilst studies examining the quality of interaction in dialogic classrooms tend to focus on learners in primary (and often upper primary) education, it would be misleading to interpret this as an indication that dialogic pedagogy is only appropriate for this age group. Studies of effective early years pedagogy from around the world have highlighted similar principles for independent, child-initiated learning where interactions between teachers and children are deepened through extended interactions—just not often specifically declaring them as dialogic. Studies in Chile (Mascareño et al., 2016), Cyprus (Vrikki & Evagorou, 2023) and Singapore (Yin et al., 2020) have all focused on the four to six age range, investigating teachers' engagement with children with particular attention to patterns of interaction. They have found that often the IRF (initiation, response and feedback) structures identified by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) in their 1970s study of classroom interaction were also prevalent in these early learning settings. Focusing on the feedback part of this interactional structure, in Cyprus, Vrikki and Evagorou (2023) investigated different types of teacher follow-up questions, finding that both open and closed questions have a role to play in supporting younger learners. Whilst their findings were used to draw out theories relating to dialogic pedagogy more generally, their investigation of this age group adds important age-breadth to the field. Also looking at teacher responses/feedback, in Canada,

Tsybina et al. (2006) focused particularly on recasts as a feature of language learning, where practitioners support children by reforming and reframing their responses to model how they might be clearer in their expressions of ideas. They argue that recasting is an important feature of language learning as it allows children to focus on language structures, comparing their own responses to those modelled by their teachers. However, they questioned whether sometimes these recasts were too complex for young children in their L2 learning context to subsequently embed in their own responses.

Two studies from Finland and the US offer more explicitly dialogic insights into successful interactions with adults and children in early years settings, both focusing on children aged five to six years old and examining not just the language used but how adults position themselves to support and encourage their children. In Rasku-Puttonen et al.'s (2012) study of Finnish pre-schoolers (aged five to six) they observed dialogical interactions between teachers and children and found three different talk patterns. The first pattern observed was a simple question and answer sequence and reflected the more typical IRF patterns described above; the second pattern they found extended the IRF sequence by elaborating feedback (as also suggested by Vrikki & Evagorou, 2023). The third pattern, however, took this further and offered responsivity that was more fine-tuned to the age of the children. The researchers describe it as "allowing space for a child-initiated sharing of ideas" (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012, p. 143) echoing the definition of sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004; Sylva et al., 2004). Importantly, they highlight that it was the teacher's ability to be "sensitive and responsive" (p. 146) that was central to encouraging children. They created a framework of five techniques that they argued teachers used, including the ways that demonstrated how they respected and appreciated children's ideas and how they were able to pursue these and let them develop naturally (without being pressured by time) whilst also keeping the ideas on track. Finally, the researchers found that the teachers summarised, "the knowledge that had been accumulated, the new concepts learned and the ideas presented" (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012, p. 146). This idea of summary is more than simply "recasting", which is often used to model language structures. Rather, it reflects important critical thinking skills, with teachers demonstrating how coherence is built into an argument.

The second study, this time from Ohio (Piasta et al., 2012), also focused on the conversational responsiveness of the teachers to children's ideas. Again, working with five- to six-year-olds, the researchers highlight the warmth of teachers and how they used many engagement strategies to encourage children. They separate these techniques into "communication-facilitating" and "language-development strategies" (Piasta et al., 2012, p. 388). Like others, they highlight the modelling of language, using recasting, expanding and stressing particular words to emphasise them. They also acknowledge the importance of being "warm and receptive" and "using a slow-pace" (p. 392) alongside other features of dialogic pedagogy such as the use of open questions, peer-talk and prompting further turns by inviting further responses.

These two studies are important to acknowledge as they move beyond the identification of commonly recognised dialogic features into consideration of what this might look like in early learning settings. They highlight not just the ways that teachers model how to use language but also how they build a dialogic ethos through being welcoming and receptive to children's ideas. With this existing research in mind, this article sets out to answer two research questions:

RQ1: How does the language that teachers use encourage and facilitate young children's ideas in whole class early learning contexts?

RQ2: How do these teachers navigate and realise a path through multiple pedagogical considerations?

2. Materials and Methods

The sociocultural positioning of this study recognises that language, thinking and learning are inherently socially bound (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002; Wertsch, 1991). This is also apparent in the dialogic pedagogy that is being investigated, as the sharing of ideas together signals to children that knowledge is socially constructed and that they are contributors. The study of dialogic pedagogy in classroom settings typically draws on a number of similar and related approaches, sociocultural discourse analysis (Mercer, 2005), linguistic ethnography (Rampton, 2007; Tusting, 2020), micro-ethnography (Bloome et al., 2005) and ethnography of communication (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Saville-Troike, 2003). Whilst the differences between these can be seen as nuanced, with arguably, sociolinguistics as an overarching frame, the importance of these approaches is that they do not look at language and communication in isolation, but rather as situated within a sociocultural context, taking into consideration both macro- and micro-perspectives of the language in use.

Linguistic ethnography is particularly useful for this study, as not only does it highlight the larger contexts in which language is happening akin to the other sociolinguistic approaches, it also pays attention to the relationships between actors in the setting, endeavouring to understand how they are responding to each other and how they are affected by the situation that they are in. This is a subtle difference, but important when considering the dialogic principles enacted through an "ethic of relating" (Aukerman & Boyd, 2020, p. 380). So, for example, in considering a teacher's interaction with one child it is also useful to consider broader influences on how they are engaging (Are they trying to reach a learning goal? Are they aware that the young children have been sitting still for a while? Are they seeking to include everyone, yet also challenge children to explore their responses?) As Lefstein and Snell (2020, p. 63) observe, teachers are "occupied" with "student concerns, classroom power relations and institutional pressures whilst also living up to dialogic ideals". They suggest that linguistic ethnography offers a "multi-dimensional and holistic understanding of the complexities of classroom dialogue" (p. 73). As it considers the contextual factors that impact on the interactions, linguistic ethnography allows for insights into how people interact and why they might do so in a particular way (Copland & Creese, 2015).

2.1. Units of Analysis

A challenging feature of analysing language in context and taking the micro-/macro-approach is how to decide on units of analysis. These need to be small enough to be manageable, but also to have meaning. Several authors have highlighted the dangers of reductive coding where utterances are considered in isolation (Bloome et al., 2005; Lefstein et al., 2015; Rajala et al., 2012). Bloome et al. (2005, p. 22) identify "instructional units" as a useful unit of analysis as they capture sequences of exchanges around meaning points. Within an IRF pattern, all three aspects would be captured. In their work on lag sequencing, Lefstein et al. (2015) decided that a minimum of three turns was "methodologically expedient and theoretically sound unit of analysis of classroom discourse" (Lefstein et al., 2015, p. 869) to capture the teacher feedback/follow-up to responses from children. Hardman's (2019) study also examined the variety of follow-up moves taken by teachers, demonstrating how they impacted on student responses. Rajala et al. (2012, p. 64) similarly described the importance of the "expanded response", as the third part of an exchange noting how it not only acknowledges what has gone before but points the way forward (echoing Vrikki's and Evagorou's interest in take-up questioning). Alexander (2020, p. 115) describes this as a "critical moment of choice" as it crucially determines where learning could be extended. More than this though, he argues that it is the teacher follow-up turn that signals to children whose voices really matter, and whether meanings really are open and collaboratively

constructed (p. 118). Therefore, following this logic, the minimum number of turns of interest when considering the impact of the teacher's follow-up must be at least four, in order to analyse the child's further response (T initiation—C response—T follow-up—C further response), and, thus, episodes of four related turns or more are considered in the present study as dialogic chains, (following Maine, 2015; Wells, 1981).

Linguistic ethnography allows for analysis at a macro-level (using quantitative measures to examine lesson length, participation structures, etc.), a meso-level (examining the movement between different linguistic "events" (Bloome et al., 2005) bounded by their pedagogical purpose and episodes of dialogic interaction or IRF), and a micro-level (examining the language of children and teachers in sequences of at least four connected turns, or dialogic chains). As such it enables an iterative movement between close-up and broader views of how and, potentially, why children and teachers engage with each other in the ways that they do.

2.2. The Context of the Study

The classes included in the study were part of a larger research project which was focused on developing children's disposition to be empathetic, inclusive and tolerant in discussions with their peers (European Commission, 2021). The larger dataset included data from seven countries of lessons conducted with three age ranges published as a multilingual corpus (Rapanta et al., 2021). The subset of data analysed in this current study was the six classes of five- to six-year-olds in England. The larger dataset contained transcripts from two lessons in each class. The lesson chosen for analysis in the present study was selected as it contained several whole-class discussion opportunities. It also fell in the middle of the planned 15-week programme, when the classes were familiar with the format of the project lessons. In fact, the COVID pandemic disrupted the latter parts of the programme, so it was the final lesson recorded.

The classes represented a mix of urban and rural schools in the East of England with a range of ethnic diversity between 25% and 49% from minority ethnic backgrounds. The schools represented a range of socio-economic backgrounds of 5–15% of children eligible for free school meals, lower than the national average, which was 17.3% in January 2020 (Department for Education, 2020). The classes comprised between 18 and 31 children.

At the data collection point, teachers had engaged in two professional learning workshops where the principles of dialogic teaching had been discussed, with ideas shared for how to engage children inclusively in talk in the classroom. As part of the workshop, teachers had viewed the film resource and talked about how key themes from it might be discussed. The idea of ground rules for talk had also been problematised, drawing teachers' attention to how these could be used as "tools" for talk, rather than as a means of behaviour management (DIALLS, 2021b). Institutionally approved ethical consents had been obtained to video-record the children in whole-class and small group discussions, and the transcripts used are anonymised using numbers to identify different speakers. The class identifiers in this present study reflect the codes in the main dataset (Rapanta et al., 2021). This group of lessons was the second set to be recorded, so the classes were familiar with the researchers observing and recording their classroom interactions.

The focus of the lesson was for children to discuss the concept of home and belonging. The stimulus for this was a short film where the children watched a homesick character, stuck on the moon, as they stared sadly back at the Earth. The notes for the lesson guided teachers to begin with a simple discussion about the meaning of the word "home", to watch the film and discuss what home might mean to the character and then broaden the discussion out to talk about home and belonging more generally. The guidance was for the session to last up to 30 min, with the children gathered to talk together with the teacher in a

whole-class discussion. In all classes the children were seated "on the carpet", not at desks or tables. Some classes organised this by seating children in a wide circle so they could all see each other and the teacher; others had the children seated on the floor facing them in a close-proximity group. The lessons were video-recorded, and a simple transcription style was used, with words transcribed verbatim ("cos", "yeah") and squared brackets denoting overlaps. Stressed words were capitalised.

3. Results

3.1. Macro-Level Analysis

The data were first quantitatively handled, calculating lesson length in minutes, the number of turns taken and the percentages of turns taken by children or teachers. The number of words used by teachers and children were also calculated and the percentage of the total lesson that these took. This macro-level analysis enabled some broad comparisons to be made about the lessons (see Table 1). In total 256 min of talk, including 2899 turns and 31,206 words were analysed.

Table 1. Quantitative data showing lesson lengths in minutes, turns taken and words spoken.

Class	Length of Session in Minutes	Total Turns	Teacher Turns	% Turns by Teacher	Total Words	Teacher Words	% Words by Teacher
AB	37	570	216	37.9	5137	2651	51.6
AD	45	512	176	34.4	5921	3796	64.1
AE	51	670	297	44.3	6925	4668	67.4
AK	37	333	145	43.5	4157	2771	66.7
AG	57	657	266	43.5	6755	4082	60.4
AM	29	157	80	51.0	2311	1810	78.3
Total	256	2899			31,206		

The table shows that the longest session in minutes was in Class AG with a 57 min session and AM had the shortest session at 29 min (the closest to the lesson guidance). It is worth noting that there were fewer children in Class AM (18 in total) and Class AG had the second largest class (27 in total) as this may have affected the lesson length. In all classes the percentage of teacher turns was 51% or less, with lower percentages in AB and AD. However, whilst the number and percentage of teacher turns gives some insight into the classroom interactions, the number of words and the percentage of these that were used by teachers gives a closer indication of who was talking. Here, it becomes clear that Teacher AD's turns were longer, as whilst they only took 34.4% of the turns, the total number of words they used represented 64.1% of all words spoken. In contrast, whilst Teacher AB took 37.9% of the turns, they also spoke a significantly lower number of the total words than the other teachers (51.6%), suggesting shorter turns than Teacher AD.

3.2. Meso-Level Analysis

Next, each lesson was divided into "events" (Bloome et al., 2005) to capture the different participation structures and purposes of different parts of the lesson. This meso-analysis identified six different types of event bounded by changes in purpose or participation style: discussion (where teachers led children in discussing either interpretations of the film or more abstract and philosophical ideas); unguided reasoning (either spontaneous, unsolicited interpretations/ideas made by the children, usually while watching the film, or sections where the teacher asked the children to talk amongst themselves); description (where the teacher led the children to describe what they had seen or to generate a list); context setting (where the teacher explicitly told the children the purpose of the lesson and situated it within the wider learning trajectory of the programme); direct instruction

about dialogue (where teachers commented on how the children should engage together, gave them specific models for responding or drew attention to the ground rules for talk); and classroom organisation (where teachers managed the children's behaviour, dealt with issues such as children needing the toilet, or misbehaviour). Teachers moved between these events, by including discussion at different points throughout the lesson, or inserting short segments of direct teaching about dialogue. Figure 1 shows the percentage of turns that were coded as part of the different events in each class.

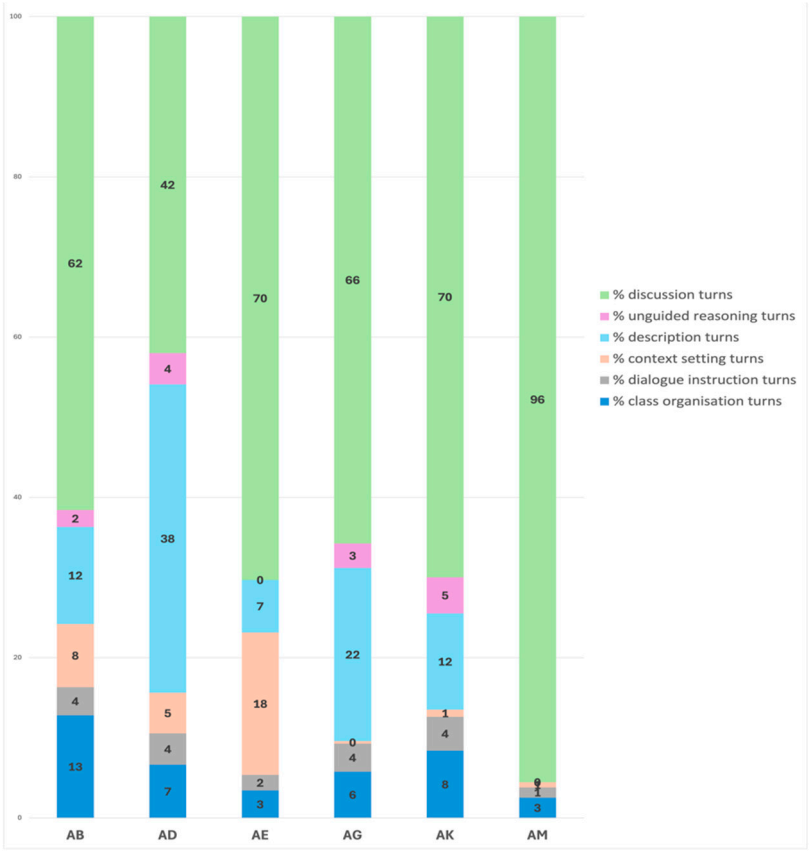

Figure 1. Percentage of turns coded as part of each different event.

The breakdown of different events in the lesson shows that Class AM (whilst also the shortest lesson) had the largest proportion of dedicated to discussion (96% of turns) with none spent in description. On looking at the transcript this appears to be because in this class the children did not talk while watching the film or generate a list of ideas whilst the teacher wrote them but did not comment on them, as happened in other classes. On the other hand, teacher AD had the most turns that were part of descriptive events (38%), involving closed questions and a round of single statement answers by children, and the least percentage of turns taken as discussion (42%). Context setting was minimal in classes AG, AK and AM, but noticeably longer in Class AE taking up 18% of the turns.

Whilst all six of the different event types might have featured extended exchanges between children and their teachers, the "discussion" events were isolated as the core focus for the study, as these were the events where the purpose of exploration of ideas was central for all classes, even if teachers approached this task in different ways. These sections of the lessons were analysed for each class to look closely at exchanges that included either IRF sequences (three related turns) or longer dialogic chains of at least four turns between the class teacher and an individual child. Occasionally more than one child was included in the same exchange around an idea, though this was usually used as a segue for the teacher

to engage with a new child. In total there were 143 dialogic chains, which included a total of 1097 turns to be analysed. (See Figure 2).

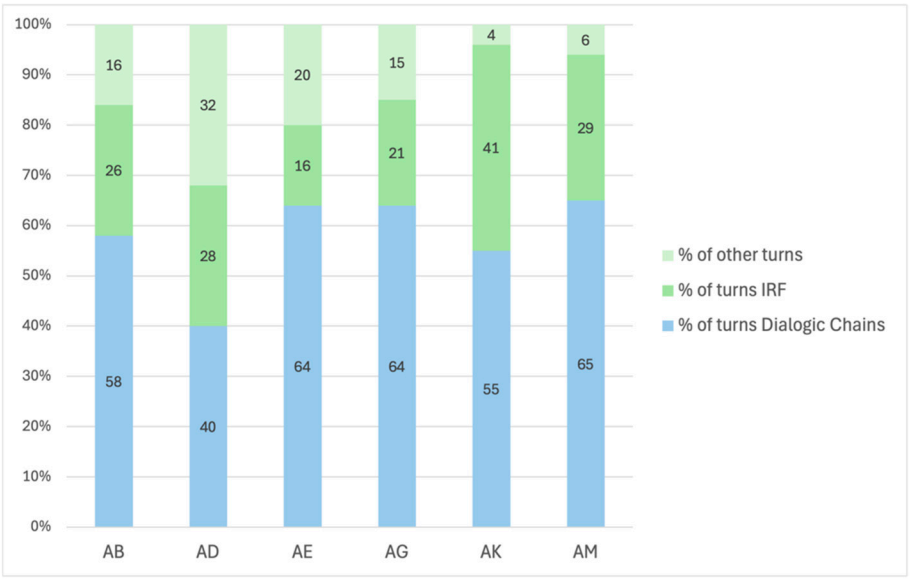

Figure 2. Percentage of IRF and Dialogic Chains in discussion events.

Differentiating between sequences of IRF (three turns) and dialogic chains (four+ turns) enabled a more nuanced dissection of the interactions as impact of the teacher's follow-up on the child's response could be analysed more closely (in the qualitative analysis section that follows). At this meso-level though, the make-up of the discussion events in terms of IRF or dialogic chain interactions shows that in all classes, dialogic chains were more common than IRF. There were of course, other turns in these events that were neither IRF nor dialogic chains, and these were typically statements by the teachers, short interjections by children or places where children started to say something but did not complete their idea. These take up the highest percentage of turns in Class AD (32%), but 20% or less in all other classes. In a similar pattern, in all classes other than AD, the dialogic chains made up 55% or more of the discussion events. The average length of these chains for all teachers was between 6.5 and 8.3 turns.

The nature of the dialogic chains in each class can be exemplified by drawing on three of the lessons, in classes AB, AD and AE. These classes were chosen for qualitative analysis as macro- and meso- level analysis indicated points of difference deemed worthy of exploration; for AB, a lower percentage of teacher words and turns, and for AD a lower percentage of discussion turns and dialogic chains. AE was chosen as the third lesson as it contained the most discussion turns, though as a percentage of the lesson this appeared average due to the lengthy context setting events.

The examples included are not intended to make comment on individual teachers, it would be wrong to take a 30 min segment as a generalisable unit about their whole pedagogic style, but the examples are informative when considering effective teacher interaction with this age group and how these are more, and sometimes less, successful.

3.3. Micro-Level Analysis of Class AB

The lesson in Class AB was 37 min, average (within 5 min) for the dataset, including 570 turns of which 351 turns were part of whole-class discussion. There were 24 children present and 17 different children spoke. This class had the most balance in terms of number of words spoken by teacher compared to children (51%). Unlike other classes Teacher AB

took time to acknowledge the researcher in the room and many of the classroom organisation turns were taken to establish the importance of the positioning of the microphones.

IRF sequences in this class often included Teacher AB repeating a child's answer and emphasising a word that signal a "correct response". For example, in the following sequence (Table 2) where the teacher is asking the children to share their ideas about "what home is", they demonstrate what they feel to be the importance of some ideas over others:

Table 2. Extract 1—Class AB, LL103-115.

Line	Speaker	Speech
103	S5	Where I can watch mov- movies with my family.
104	T	Where you can watch movies with your FAMILY. S11?
105	S11	Play computer games.
106	T	Where you can play your computer games. S8?
107	S8	Spend time with your family.
108	T	Where you can spend TIME with your family. S1?
109	S1	Where my little sister annoys me.
110	T	Where YOUR little sister annoys you too. S23.
111	S23	Where I can spend time with my best baby sister ever.
112	T	A new baby sister as well, isn't it?
113	S23	(Nods)
114	S5	[You have two baby sisters].
115	T	[Oh that's] really interesting that lots of you Moles are saying that where home is to you is where your FAMILY is. That's really interesting. S6?

This recasting through emphasis is used to build a connection between the responses, ignoring some ideas (movies and computer games) and valuing others (FAMILY, TIME, YOUR). However, the teacher also demonstrates that they are responding meaningfully to the contributions children make, by referring to things that they know about the child, for example, where one child mentioned home being somewhere where they could spend time with their "best baby sister ever" (L111), the teacher responds by adding "a new baby sister as well, isn't it?" (L112). Teacher AB signals that they are summarising the points together, by stating how "interesting" it is, then finalises the comment by repeating "interesting" without further elaboration.

Teacher AB takes time to encourage the children to extend their ideas and position them in relation to the ideas of others, and this generates the longest dialogic chain, described next, that also includes a spontaneous challenge by another child. The sequence (Table 3) is originally initiated by a child (S10) suggesting that the character crashed on the moon and he was stuck there. The teacher invites other children to agree or disagree and why:

Table 3. Extract 2—Class AB, LL338-339.

Line	Speaker	Speech
338	S10	He might have flew up to the moon to tell his family what it was like, but then his spaceship crashed on the moon, so then he never actually got to come down.
339	T	Mmm. So S10 thinks that he flew to the moon to see what it was like, a bit like astronauts do, S20, but his spaceship crashed and he got stuck there. Put your hand up if you AGREE and you can tell me WHY you disagree and you can add something onto it? S5.

Teacher AB recasts S10's idea and draws in another child by name (S20) which may be a moment of classroom management to regain their attention but could equally refer back to a previous comment that S20 had made about travelling around the moon. After several children have shared the ideas that they propose as agreements the teacher enters an extended dialogic chain with S15 (Table 4).

Table 4. Extract 3—Class AB, LL357-371.

Line	Speaker	Speech
357	T	[Does anyone] think 'I disagree with what S10 said'? S15.
358	S15	I disagree with S10 because he might of actually just wanted to see what space looked like and—but, instead, he changed his mind [and he might]-
359	S5	[But why is he crying]?
360	S15	of went to live on the moon.
361	T	Mmm, so he might have thought 'I'm going to go and look at space' and got to space and thought, 'It's pretty nice up here, actually. Lot of cheese available at my disposal'.
362	S15	The {unclear}.
363	T	(laughs) S5 had a REALLY good question though for you, S15. Can you ask S15 that question that you just said?
364	S5	But why would he be crying?
365	T	Why do you think he was crying [if he want]-
366	S15	[Because he's] proud?
367	T	Because he's proud
368	S15	[That may happen].
369	T	Why is he proud?
370	S15	Because he made it up there.
371	T	Mmm. S4?

Initially Teacher AB refers back to S10's idea, but does not restate it, and this leaves the ownership of the idea with the child rather than being claimed and reshaped as a teacher-led question. S15 offers a reasonable counterpoint to S10's suggestion. The extension of this idea is enabled by the interjection from S5, who demonstrates that they have thought about the logic of what is being proposed, "But why would be crying?" (L359). Teacher AB is able to respond to this, validating the question (L363) by asking S5 to repeat it themselves, and then recasts to include the desired language, "Why do you think. . ." (L365). S15's response to this does not entirely make sense, and Teacher AB moves on to another child.

3.4. Micro-Level Analysis of Class AD

A slightly longer lesson was held in Class AD (37 min), which contained fewer turns and a shorter percentage of time spent in whole class discussion with a similar amount of time spent in description, where the children reported what they could see and hear in the film. There were 24 children in the class and 17 of them spoke in the session. Within the discussion time, this class had the lowest number of dialogic chains of all the lessons and far more non-codable one word, or broken, interjections (32% of the turns).

Teacher AD spent time explaining the metaphor of "building" on what someone else had said and then extended this metaphor it to include the idea of blocks of ideas (Table 5):

Table 5. Extract 4—Class AD, L299.

Line	Speaker	Speech
299	T	And uhm the skill is to BUILD on ideas. It says on the board 'I can BUILD on ideas' and there's a picture of a beaver there building. That's the closest thing I could find to a squirrel unfortunately on Google images but there you go. So, I can build on ideas. Now, there is a, there is a beaver building. Now, do you think i actually mean we're going to building with blocks today?

Unfortunately, this was confused when the children started to discuss the difference between a house and a home and "building" took on a different meaning. Concentrating on the structures of the contributions, Teacher AD also often interrupted children to help them formulate their ideas (Table 6):

Table 6. Extract 5—Class AD, LL314-319.

Line	Speaker	Speech
314	S6	I disagree with S15 and S10 because -
315	T	And I'd like to add'.
316	S6	And I'd like to add that -
317	T	To the circle, please.
318	S6	home is—so homes are [. . .] like places that people live and hotels are fancy like places where you just stay for uhm a few days or something?
319	T	That is a big difference, isn't it, between a home and another BUILDING like a hotel. OK. Not just thinking about hotels, but buildings in general we're thinking about now. Right, one more? Disagree or agree. It's up to you. 'I disagree with mmm and I'd like to add', or 'I AGREE with mmm and I'd like to add'. S24.

In this sequence the content of S6's idea is that homes are more permanent places to be. In responding, Teacher AB stresses that it is another "BUILDING" (L319), leading to potential confusion with the metaphor for extending an idea. In another similar sequence, the same child suggests that maybe the character was regretting moving to the moon, but again the content of the idea was somewhat lost within the scaffolding of the structure of it and classroom organisation (Table 7):

Table 7. Extract 6—AD, LL340-349.

Line	Speaker	Speech
340	S6	I think -
341	T	Go on.
342	S6	I -
343	T	To the circle, please.
344	S6	I-
345	T	I'm hearing lots from the same people, which is lovely, but there's lots of people who are—who aren't sharing. So if you'd like to share -
346	S6	I agree with -
347	T	butt in. Yeah.
348	S6	I agree with S12 because, actually, the moon might be his home if—'cos he might have lived on earth but then he might have moved house and he wanted to go to the moon and that is where he might've wanted to live. But then he might've wanted to go back to earth and he might have wished he didn't move to the moon.
349	T	Right. Interesting. I'm coming to you in a minute (pointing to S11).

The sequence highlights a challenge in the management of whole class discussions with young children. S6 is undeterred and not only makes their point but even adds an extended and articulate justification (L348) highlighting the importance of provisionality (for example, by using modal words such as "might") and how even young children can employ this tool for engaging in argument (see Maine & Čermáková, 2023). Whilst this exchange is a chain including several teacher and child turns, the close analysis shows that the initial idea is not extended by the teacher, just scaffolded to use desired language. Ultimately, it is an IRF exchange with a brief acknowledgement, "Right. Interesting." (L349) by the teacher.

3.5. Micro-Level Analysis of Class AE

Examining the quantitative data for Class AE, it shows relatively similar patterns to other classes. It was one of the longer lessons at 51 min and the teacher spoke 67% of the total words. The class was larger than the others, with 31 children, of whom 22 spoke in the lesson. This lesson included far more context setting than any of the other classes about the purpose of the lesson and programme itself. The turns that were deemed to be

discussion, where children were invited to share their ideas rather than to describe what they could see or hear, represented 70% of the lesson. Within this, 64% of the turns were part of dialogic chains involving four or more turns and only 16% of turns were part of IRF sequences. However, analysing the dialogic chains more closely revealed differences in the way that Teacher AE wove together the strands of thinking from different children and used recasting to extend ideas and prompt new ones. In this first extract from Class AE (Table 8), the teacher engages with S10, whilst quickly dealing with an interjection from S21:

Table 8. Extract 7–Class AE, LL186-199.

Line	Speaker	Speech
186	T	S10, I'm going to come to you ['cos you've been waiting].
187	S21	[{Unclear}].
188	T	S21, thank you. Shh, shh.
189	S10	Uhm so I share my house with uhm lots of people—with my grandma, I share my car with my grandma.
190	T	Oh WOW. So, your grandma's home is YOUR home as well? Or does she have aNOTHER home?
191	S10	She has another home and she comes and stays sometimes.
192	T	She comes and stays sometimes. So, she's not there ALL the time?
193	S10	(Shakes head)
194	T	OK. Do you think you have to be somewhere—S7, S7, do you think you have to be somewhere ALL the time for it to be HOME? It's [quite]-
195	S7	[I]-
196	T	difficult question, I think.
197	S7	No.
198	T	I wonder what makes home home 'cos I was away at the weekend and I was very lucky and I went to stay in somebody else's home 'cos they weren't there and they live by the seaside, and I was allowed to go and STAY there. And it was THEIR home but not MY home but I was staying there? [. . .] Hmm. So -
199	S29	They let you share it.

The exchange starts with an acknowledgement of S10's patience, in a positive signal to the other children about the rewards of waiting to take a turn. The value of S10's contribution is signalled further by the swift management of S21's interjection (L188), giving S10 the floor. Similarly to the other teachers, Teacher AE uses emphasis to focus the idea, "YOUR home as well" (L190), and then follows up with a question to clarify grandma's living arrangements. In response to this further exchange, echoing the extended patterns identified by Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012), Teacher AE recasts the response and asks a follow-up closed question. The exchange gives space for S21 to share their ideas and Teacher AE's responses seem authentically interested in finding out more, not just encouraging reasoning or elaboration. Teacher AE uses the answer to frame a new challenge (L194) and explicitly invites a different child to share their thinking about this new consideration, "Do you have to be somewhere ALL the time for it to be HOME". The key ideas are stressed for emphasis. S7 is not able to answer this new tricky question, and Teacher AE reflects on the question itself, saving face for S7 (L196), "Difficult question, I think". They follow up by giving an example from their own life (which then prompts a new discussion about who they live with and the names of their partner and dogs!). The turn finishes with ellipsis, "Hmm. So. . ." (L198), which then prompts S29 to offer their own reflection on the point. By bringing their own experiences to bear, Teacher AE positions themselves as a genuine contributor to the discussion, which is posed as a puzzle to investigate that has been prompted by one of the children's responses (L191). The teacher's contribution demonstrates to the children that knowledge is build and shared collectively.

The following extract (Table 9) is a longer section that includes the end of a dialogic chain with one child (S29), a short exchange with another (S27) and then a third much

longer dialogic chain with another (S13). In the middle of this another child (S8) requests a toilet break but this does not break the flow of the discussion:

Table 9. Extract 8—Class AE, LL362-387.

Line	Speaker	Speech
362	T	Who thinks he's got a home on the moon? (Many hands raised). Who doesn't think he's got a home on the moon? (Some hands raised). OK S29, why don't you think he's got a home on the moon? 'Cos some people think he's got a home in two places, some people are a bit unsure whether he's just LIVING there but it's not really a good HOME 'cos he doesn't have all his FRIENDS. What do you think?
363	S29	Cos he hasn't his friends.
364	T	So hold on a minute, go back. Do you think he HAS a home on the moon or he just lives there?
365	S29	He just lives there.
366	T	Just lives there. He's got no friends there. OK. S8, can you talk to S2 'cos you're building on what she said, darling?
367	S8	I need the toilet.
368	T	OK, off you go then. S27?
369	S27	But, but {unclear} friends are not going to build home. They're uhm build them. Yeah. Yeah. Live—on moon, yeah.
370	T	So, he lives on the moon but he's not got his friends so it's not really a home?
371	S27	No.
372	T	Right. OK. Has anybody changed their mind on that? Is it -
373	S13	That's not really true.
374	T	Go on then, you talk to S27, say it.
375	S13	Because if you like have friends and you live on the moon, that doesn't mean it's not your home because the home is where you LIVE and it doesn't matter if you live on your own.
376	T	[. . .] So it can be home withOUT the friends?
377	S13	Yeah.
378	T	Yeah?
379	S13	Even though—because we need somewhere to STAY and SLEEP and live there 'cos you won't have anywhere to go around and play games or doing running or exercising unLESS you can do all that stuff on your own but only games you CAN do on your own. But when you—and you still have FUN but when you are with your friends, it's a bit more better. That's only what makes the difference.
380	T	OK. So the difference is, I suppose, how you FEEL about where you are?
381	S13	And think how you actually FEEL to be where you are [and if you]-
382	T	[Absolutely].
383	S13	really like that place or want to live in other places. [And I think]-
384	T	[So, what do we]-
385	S13	he wants to move house.
386	T	You think he does? Does anybody else think that he DOES want to move home? (Some hands raised) Where do we think he might want to move TO? S5.
387	S5	To his mum's home.

Firstly, the extract highlights an important aspect on analysing dialogue in real contexts. The talk overlaps, it includes interjections and ideas take time to establish. It provides another example of the teacher managing the reality of a class of five- to six-year-olds who by this point in the lesson have been sitting for over 30 min (L367), whilst also maintaining a coherent thread to the collective idea of what a home is. To ensure the connection to the puzzle the class are trying to resolve, Teacher AE starts by summarising the differences that they are trying to establish between "LIVING there" and it being "HOME" (L362). When S29 gives an incomplete and possibly not related response, the teacher directs their thinking to the question at hand and then shows how both responses are linked, "Just lives there. He's got no friends there." (L366). The second dialogic chain in the sequence is again similarly short, with the teacher follow-up (L371) leading to a one-word answer. At this point, S13 starts a new chain, unprompted (L373). Teacher AE encourages elaboration of the point by asking S13 to direct their answer to S27 with whom they are disagreeing (a disagreement tempered using "really"). Unlike some of the examples from the other classes,

the teacher does not break the flow of the contribution by either recasting or demanding a particular response structure, such as "I disagree because…". This focus on meaning continues through the dialogic chain, with S13 picking up the teacher's style of emphasising key words (STAY, SLEEP, CAN and FUN) as they extend their idea. The section between lines 380 and 385 highlights a particularly fluid movement of dialogue between teacher and child; their comments overlap as each adds to the idea and S13 mirrors the use of Teacher AE's stress on the word "FEEL" (L380 and L381). Teacher AE finishes the dialogic chain in L386 by taking S13's final idea and inviting other children to build on it, "Where do we think he might want to move TO?" (though she does not explicitly name this as building).

4. Discussion

A linguistic ethnographic approach to analysing the data from the six classrooms demonstrates the complexity of interactions where teachers are responding in the moment to their young learners. It shows how subtle shifts in focus allow teachers to manage the organisation of their classes, to include multiple children in whole-class discussion while also remaining focused on a topic area with varying degrees of success. From a methodological perspective, using dialogic chains of four or more turns as a units of analysis allowed for a focus on the meanings made in the interaction, rather than trying to tease out the dialogic functions of individual utterances. Trying to reliably code turns for their dialogic function is a challenging enough process when the children are older and taking clearly defines turns in whole class discussion. However, for this younger age group, such a level of coding could quickly become meaningless and potentially miss the importance of how teachers enable children to build their ideas through variations in recasting, explicit and implicit modelling and encouragement through demonstration of investment in children's ideas. Even relying rigidly on dialogic chains with four or more turns has the potential to miss important indications of the dialogic pedagogy at hand. So, whilst a useful starting point to dive into the data, these chains should not be seen as the end point of analysis. The purpose of coding and segmenting as a means of managing extensive data should not undermine careful qualitative and ethnographic considerations of the content of what is being said.

The findings show evidence of the strategies highlighted by researchers of young children's interaction with their teachers, and these are deemed dialogic in their intention and enactment. The emphasis of key words to help understanding (Piasta et al., 2012) and recasting of ideas (Tsybina et al., 2006) is evident throughout the data. Micro-level analysis also allows for the identification of moments when teachers choose not to recast but either reference or link back to the contributions of other children or invite them to make their point again. Examples of this were shown in Class AB when the teacher linked back to S10's comment some turns earlier, but did not repeat it, and again when they invited S5 to repeat an unsolicited question. Making these choices allowed for the idea to remain the child's without being claimed by the teacher through their recasting of it. This further gives value to the child's voice and perspective, a central feature of dialogic pedagogy. Subtleties such as S13's mirroring of the Teacher AE's use of stress to emphasis key words, or Teacher AB's comment about S23's baby sister give glimmers of insight into the warmth of relationship between teachers and children that reflect a dialogic "ethic of relating" (Aukerman & Boyd, 2020, p. 380).

Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012) paid close attention to how teachers allow space for children to initiate the sharing of ideas, with emphasis on respect and appreciation of different contributions, pursuing the children's lines of thinking without rushing them, all the while keeping the ideas on track. These features were particularly evident in the interactions of Teacher AE, who segued into dialogic chains with new children by explicitly

asking them to reflect on comments just made. The values communicated by performing this implicitly emphasise the importance placed on listening to each other's ideas and maintaining a coherent thread of thinking. As such, Teacher AE was able to maintain a flow to the discussion and an avoidance of it becoming fragmented. This was less apparent in Class AD. There, the teacher often finished an interaction with one child by stating that their idea was interesting and then abruptly asking another child for a contribution. This could be a reflection of being less experienced with juggling the multiple lines of thinking from a group of five- and six-year-olds, or even a reflection of the pressure of being videoed and "on show". However, set alongside the interactions of Teacher AE, it was clear that the contributions in Class AD seemed more fragmented, with ideas individually expanded but not as a whole class collaborative endeavour. It was interesting that in this class the flow of ideas was interrupted by the scaffolding of the teacher as they focused on the use of key language in the response rather than its meaning, signalling a value of style over substance, or a language-focused orientation (Aukerman & Boyd, 2020).

A further tension in the classes came from the use of metaphors to describe dialogic functions and the use of different signals to indicate a desire to contribute. The notion of building ideas was embedded as part of the lesson plan, with the intention that teachers would encourage ideas in the discussion to be linked together (as opposed to the more complex skill of deepening through further justification). However, the explanation of this by the teachers quickly became confusing as the topic also included a different and more tangible meaning of a building. The transcripts do not show that any of the teachers recognised this issue. Teacher AD and AE additionally introduced complex hand signals for the children to show what type of contribution they were giving (pumping of fists or extending hands palm up). These curious additions to the traditional signal of hand-raising did little to support the coherence of the collective sense-making endeavour and led to long explanatory turns by teachers as they tried to clarify concepts and signals for the children (Teacher AB and AD). Additional metaphors were introduced by Teacher AB as she prompted the children to use "sentence stems" to shape their contributions and explicitly asked the children to say if they were agreeing or disagreeing.

Holding onto one's own idea whilst simultaneously weighing up its relevance to ideas that have been put forward is no mean feat for discussants of any age. The interjections from S5 in Class AB ("But why would he be crying?") and S13 in Class AE ("That's not really true") demonstrate sophisticated engagement with arguments that have been presented, and in both cases the teachers adapted to the direction the children's input took the discussion. When teachers introduced their own opinions (most notably Teacher AE), they were able to achieve two goals at once: they gave models for the language of ideas sharing and also showed they were committed to the content of the discussion.

There are, of course, limitations in this study. The small number of lessons included, the different lengths of each lesson, the differences in the cohorts of children and the teachers themselves mean that care should be taken in regarding these findings as comprehensive or generalisable. Taken as snapshots into the world of early learning classrooms, however, they provide insights into the many different factors at play "in the moment" when teachers are interacting with children. The data highlight the sociocultural variance of learning, how each teaching moment is unique as it builds on the particular context and the shared learning of those involved, even if, broadly, the learning intentions of the lesson are the same. On a different day, with the same teachers but different conditions, these lessons could have happened quite differently. The value of a sociolinguistic approach such as linguistic ethnography is that these differences are foregrounded. Comparing and contrasting different interactions amplifies the choices that teachers make and allows for the subtle differences in approach to be considered carefully.

5. Conclusions

This article has argued that the features of dialogic pedagogy commonly identified for older learners in primary classes and beyond (Alexander, 2020; Howe et al., 2019; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019) are also evident in younger settings but that teachers adapt their teaching differently to their counterparts who teach older children, to achieve dialogic goals. The data highlighted that in sessions where teachers used strategies to encourage children to contribute their ideas (Piasta et al., 2012; Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012; Tsybina et al., 2006), they were able to build coherent co-constructed meaning in their whole class discussions even with many children involved. These interactions were less successful when teachers seemed to prioritise the use of particular language, such as "I agree because", over the content of ideas, or when using complicated metaphors that they needed to explain at length. Lessons where the discussion flowed between all speakers, with the teacher moving between ideas seamlessly, epitomised the essence of dialogic classrooms identified in previous research with older children (Maine & Čermáková, 2021). In these moments, the ethic of relating was a central defining characteristic, demonstrating that teachers knew about their children's lives and were committed to exploring their ideas.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that it is important that strategies for the promotion of dialogue in younger classes are age-appropriate and not overly complex. This research highlights that experienced teachers of this age group use additional tools such as judicious recasting and emphasis of key words as scaffolds for children with meaning-making central and positive relationships at the core. The use of qualitative tools such as linguistic ethnography enables such patterns of interaction to be identified and allows for a detailed and nuanced examination of young children's talk with their teachers, identifying the subtle ways that their meaning-making unfolds.

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