Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion:

A Grounded Theory Study

by

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Abstract

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The purpose of this dissertation was to develop an initial theory of social studies teachers' conceptions of classroom discussion. I explored teachers' thinking about characteristics and purposes of classroom discussions, and factors that seem to influence teachers' use of discussion. Six high school social studies teachers participated in this study: three taught in a suburban high school, and three taught in an urban high school. These teachers were purposively selected to permit data collection from a diverse and theoretically interesting sample. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and a think-aloud task, and were analyzed using grounded theory's constant-comparative technique--an inductive method of generating hypotheses that are grounded in data. During the analysis of these data, six conceptions of discussion emerged. Teachers thought of discussion as recitation, teacher-directed conversation, open-ended conversation, a series of challenging questions, guided transfer of knowledge, and as practice at verbal interaction. In addition to these conceptions of discussion, five factors emerged that seemed to influence the teachers' use of their conceptions: student diversity, lesson objectives, age and maturity of students, sense of community in the classroom, and interest level of students. Explanations and excerpts from the data are provided to illustrate each of the conceptions and factors of influence.

These hypothetical categories--both the conceptions and the influences--contribute to previous research on discussion by revealing the complexity of teachers' conceptions of discussion, the influence that students have on the teacher's use of discussion, and the importance of the teacher as discussion leader. Implications of these findings for teachers, teacher educators, and for researchers who are interested in classroom discussion are also examined.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation was to develop an initial theory of social studies teachers' conceptions of classroom discussion. Through in-depth interviews, I examined six high school social studies teachers' thinking about uses, definitions, and characteristics of discussion in the classroom.

Overview of Chapter One

This chapter has five sections. In the first section, I theoretically ground my dissertation in a problem broader than teachers' conceptions of discussion: the persistence of recitation over discussion as a method of instruction. I explore a concern that recitation often replaces discussion in classrooms, or is practiced under the guise of discussion. Recitation dominates over discussion even though teachers and educational reformers herald discussion as a useful and beneficial form of classroom interaction. Discussion and recitation are different. Confusing their attributes will not allow for the social and cognitive benefits that have been credited to discussion.

After describing this primary problem, I provide a general overview of a secondary concern about the decline of public discussion among democratic citizens. Democracies may weaken when their citizens stop interacting about issues they

face in common. I suggest discussion as a way out of this weakened state, and the classroom as a fertile ground for developing and practicing discussion skills.

After exploring these two broader concerns, I then explain my rationale for studying teachers' conceptions of discussion (as opposed to students' conceptions, administrators' conceptions, parents' conceptions, or the conceptions of others in the educational setting). In the fourth section, I present the research questions. The fifth section of this chapter provides definitions of major terms used in the study. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the dissertation.

Problem One: The Persistence of Recitation Over Discussion

Discussion has enjoyed high status among forms of classroom interaction, however, its status is effectively cancelled by its low frequency. Recitation persists in the classroom (Goodlad, 1984; Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969; Stodolsky, Ferguson, & Wimpelberg, 1981) and is "seemingly invulnerable to repeated criticisms" (Cazden, 1988, p. 30). Additionally, it is not uncommon for junior and senior high school teachers and college teachers to call their recitations "discussions." Even when teachers lecture or seek specific answers to questions they pose, they often will claim that the interactions are discussions (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1984, 1990; Gall & Gall, 1990; Wilen, 1990).

Characteristics of Discussion and Recitation

Recitation and discussion are two methods of instruction with different characteristics. Recitation is characterized as a teacher-dominated classroom activity, typically entailing an interaction pattern between teacher and student similar to: Teacher initiated statement/question -> student response -> teacher feedback/evaluation (Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, & Smith, 1966; Gall & Gall, 1990; Wilen & White, 1991). The Dictionary of Education (Good, 1983) defined recitation as a "traditional learning exercise and teaching procedure in which students repeat orally or explain material learned by individual study or previously presented by the teacher and in response to questions raised by the teacher" (p. 478). In contrast to this, Wilen and White (1991) defined discussion as a "structured conversation in which participants work cooperatively to present, examine, compare, and understand often diverse views about an academic topic or issue" (p. 492). Recitation tends to be a quick-paced series of teacher-led questioning while discussion has more of a conversational form of interaction. Discussion proceeds more slowly as participants compare multiple points of view and clarify information. It becomes, according to Wilen and White, an "educative and group conversation [among] teacher and students about subject matter at higher cognitive levels" (1991, p. 489).

In their descriptions of classroom recitation, Stodolsky et al. (1981) suggested that interactions between the teacher and students were very brief and relied on the teacher's direction. Student to student interactions rarely, if ever, occurred. They distinguished between recitation and classroom discussion by saying that discussions had longer exchanges between the teacher and students, and that discussion allowed for more frequent interactions among students than recitation. During recitation they found that teachers attempted to elicit "right" answers from their students rather than opinions or ideas. In contrast, during discussions, they found that teachers frequently "solicit[ed] opinions and thoughts" from their students in an attempt to develop a particular idea (Stodolsky, et al., 1981, p. 123).

While teachers are involved in most all verbal interactions during recitations, they are not during discussion. For example, Cazden (1988) characterized a particular type of discussion as "cross-discussion," defining it as a dialogue among students in which the teacher is not constantly addressed. Students address one another publicly rather than addressing the teacher (e.g., a student will say to another student, "I think you forgot..." rather than say to the teacher, "I think she forgot...").

Purposes for Discussion and Recitation

Stodolsky et. al (1981) inferred five general purposes for classroom recitation from their observational data of 23 classrooms: 1) review, 2) introduce new material, 3) check answers to student work, 4) practice using/recalling facts, 5) checking student understanding of materials and ideas. They concluded that recitation, especially when used in conjunction with other instructional methods, may serve these pedagogical and classroom management purposes quite well. These researchers, however, were quick to point out that lessons using recitation--especially in the social studies classes they observed--"could be interesting; however, they were often banal in the extreme" (p. 129).

According to Cazden (1988), recitation occurred as the primary form of interaction between students and teachers unless deliberate action was taken to achieve some other type of interaction. Cazden illustrated the difference between non-school conversation and typical classroom talk with the following two interaction patterns:

Conversation	Classroom talk
What time is it, Sarah?	What time is it, Sarah?
Half-past two.	Half-past two.
Thanks.	Right.

(p. 30)

As you can tell, much more of an evaluative tone is present in classroom talk. Typically the teacher is the evaluator,

and uses classroom interactions to assess students' retention of specific information. While Cazden claimed that most all classroom talk is synonymous with recitation, she also found that significant social and cognitive changes occurred in students when their classroom talk shifted more toward conversations. Her suggested move away from recitation and toward discussion was clearly stated:

> One important shift is from recitation to something closer to a "real discussion"...talk in which ideas are explored rather than answers to teacher's test questions are provided and evaluated; in which teachers talk less than the usual two-thirds of the time and students talk correspondingly more; in which students themselves decide when to speak rather than waiting to be called upon by the teacher; and in which students address each other directly" (p. 55).

When this shift occurs, student learning may become more collaborative. If discussion encourages collaborative learning among students (and the teacher) it may be because discussion encourages the combining and sharing of strategies for understanding information. This allows students to consider perspectives other than their own, or in Cazden's (1988) words, "to induct the learner into a new way of thinking about categorizing, reconceptualizing...whatever phenomena are under discussion" (p. 111).

Why Recitation Persists

Recitation, however, persists. Some believe that educational objectives of some schools and their curriculum run counter to discussion (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1994). Gall and Gall (1990) supported this belief with the following criticism:

> The American curriculum tends to be fixated on content coverage and lower cognitive objectives...Given this limited instructional focus, it is probably more effective to use methods such as lecture, recitation and seatwork than have students engage in discussion (p. 42).

Teacher questioning similar to recitation is both accepted and widely used in schools. Questioning that is more in-line with discussion does not appear to be used by teachers very often. Teachers likely misuse the term "discussion" when they are really referring to lectures, recitations, or other types of teacher-dominated classroom interaction. Findings from Swift & Gooding's (1983) study of discussions led by middle school science teachers provided an example of this misuse. They found that teachers talked for 87.8% of the class period during class sessions they described as discussions.

One function of recitation for teachers is that it serves academic and managerial functions in the classrooms. For example, Gall (1985) reported that teachers hesitated to

use discussion when they perceived pressure from administrators and the community to teach a curriculum that emphasized skills and facts. They saw lecture, recitation, and mastery learning approaches as more efficient ways for students to acquire specific content.

Choosing to use recitation instead of discussion helps teachers' with classroom management. Discussion may require teachers to relinquish to students more of their authority over the instructional process than recitation or questioning. Wood and Wood (1988) found that teachers could control opportunities for student participation by the questions they asked. With their questions, teachers controlled who talked and the content of the talk. Recitation "(i)nsures that children are unlikely to diverge from the teacher's line of thought" (Wood & Wood, 1988, p. 294). However, Wood and Wood concluded that a consequence of this insurance was that teacher questions stifled student initiative, and served more as a form of "group control" than as a stimulus for thought. While recitation can challenge students to use information above low-level thinking (e.g., by asking "why" or "how" questions), it typically limits opportunities for students to use higher-level thinking skills because of its tendency toward rapid questioning and constant teacher evaluation of student responses.

Recitation also persists because it is a familiar method of instruction that produces predictable results. For

example, in an intervention experiment, Alvermann and Hayes (1989) attempted to help five high school English teachers reduce their use of recitation and increase their use of classroom discussion. They sought this change through conferences with the teachers, observations and analysis of teaching, and helping teachers plan for classroom discussion. Their efforts, however, did not result in a shift toward discussion. Rather, the teachers maintained their use of recitation. The researchers' explanation for this was that an attempt to change teachers' discussion behavior was really an attempt to modify the "very culture of the classroom...The attempted changes [from recitation to discussion] conflicted with the teachers' experiences, beliefs and intuitions" (p. 332).

The next part of this section focuses on rationales for classroom discussion that do not have characteristics of recitation.

Rationales for Using Classroom Discussion

I have categorized rationales for using classroom discussion into three sub-sections: developing thinking skills, exposing students to multiple perspectives, and building knowledge. Below I describe each in greater detail.

Developing thinking skills. Discussion is thought to be a useful teaching technique for developing higher order thinking skills; Skills that enable students to interpret,

analyze, and manipulate information. Through discussion, students explain their ideas and thoughts, rather than merely recount, or recite, memorized facts and details. During discussion, learners are not "passive" recipients of information that is transmitted from a teacher. Rather, learners are active participants. As they interact during the discussion, students construct an understanding about the topic (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Recognition of the role of discussion for developing understanding and thinking skills is not new. Over forty years ago, Schwab (1954) was clear about his belief that classroom discussion was imperative for developing in students the "intellectual arts" of thinking and communication:

> In a curriculum concerned primarily with specific understandings of specific objects, discussion as a device of instruction may be defended as a peculiarly powerful teaching instrument...but it cannot be maintained that for a curriculum so oriented discussion is indispensable. It is merely one of several usable techniques. In a curriculum, however, which aims to impart intellectual arts and skills and habits and attitudes, as well as bodies of information, discussion is not simply efficient or powerful, but indispensable, for the same reason that the act of swimming is indispensable to teaching that art and practice on the

> piano indispensable to teaching that. Discussion is an engagement in and a practice of the activities of thought and communication" (pp. 54-55).

Discussion, when combined with probing, open-ended questions, requires students to organize available information for the purpose of arriving at their own defensible answers. Engle and Ochoa (1988) suggested that the following types of questions should be evident during classroom discussions: definitional questions ("What does that mean?"), evidential questions ("What reasons can you give for your belief?"), speculative questions ("What if that hadn't happened?"), and policy questions ("What should be done?"). These types of questions are needed to stimulate student thinking and guide classroom discussions. Engle and Ochoa find them essential:

> these kinds of questions all have a tentative, unsure nature. That is, answers cannot be proved to be correct beyond a shadow of a doubt...the best that any of us can do--teachers, students, and citizens alike--is reach conclusions in a reasonable, thoughtful, and informed way. (p. 45).

For discussions to educate students, they should be serious interactions where students "support their ideas with evidence, where their opinions are subject to challenge by their peers as well as the teacher, and where the teacher's ideas are equally open to criticism" (Engle & Ochoa, 1988, p.

47). The purpose of probing questions and discrepant viewpoints is to encourage interactions and to encourage students to respond with the most powerful evidence available to them.

Newmann (1988) reported that students perceived classes as more academically challenging and thought provoking during teacher-directed discussions than during other teacher-directed activities. Classes were considered less-thoughtful when more traditional methods of instruction were used (e.g., lecture, question/answer sessions, mastery learning).

Exposure to multiple perspectives. Bridges (1979, 1987) recommended discussion for exposing students to differing points of view, learning from each other, and expanding ideas and opinions. Each of these require the students and teacher to interact at a high cognitive level with the subject matter being discussed. Said another way, the group (or class) discussion must move freely, adjusting to the expressed interests and intentions of the group.

According to Bridges (1979), the very process of discussing a topic facilitated abstract learning processes. He suggested that discussions contributed to discussants' understanding of a topic by: expanding each discussant's information on a topic with information from other discussants; fostering different perspectives on a topic; providing opportunities for discussants to present alternative ideas about a topic; providing opportunities for

other discussants to criticize, accept, or refute these alternative ideas; and encouraging mutual modifications among discussants' opinions to produce a group decision or consensus. Group interaction is the important component for each of these as it shapes and directs the exploration of a topic. The process of discussing teaches the skills of discussion itself (Bridges, 1979; Dillon, 1994; Wilen, 1990). Discussion is a give and take dialogue that encourages students to enrich and refine their understandings. Discussion can accomplish all this because it is a unique form of classroom talk and a very special group dynamic: Discussion requires students and teacher to talk back-and-forth at a high cognitive and affective level, both with one another and the subject matter being discussed. "What they talk about," Dillon writes, "is an issue, some topic that is in question for them. Their talk consists of advancing and examining different proposals over the issue" (1994, p. 7).

Discussion is different from other forms of classroom interaction, and potentially changes the traditional organization of the classroom. In most classrooms, teachers hold the following "rights" to which students cannot object (Cazden, 1988): the right to speak to any one in the room, at any time; the right to interrupt any speaker; and the right to speak to a student from anywhere in the room, and in any volume or tone. In discussions, these speaking rights are distributed more equitably. Speaking in turns is

required. The teacher does not "take the floor" after every students' turn. Students respond to each other without prompts from the teacher.

Building knowledge. Discussion is frequently referred to as an instructional method that encourages the social construction of meaning and promotes conceptual understanding. Discussion is viewed as a method of instruction that makes the learner take an active, rather than passive, role in the learning process, and helps students construct an understanding of the topic being discussed (Dillon, 1994; Miller, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Weikel, 1994). Barnes (1992)[1] metaphorically used the writing process to explain the usefulness of discussion in helping students build understanding. Where a written final draft is the result of a series of written rough drafts, Barnes says we use "final-draft talk" only after a series of rough, "exploratory talk" episodes. Exploratory talk is characterized by self correction, slow pace, frequent redirection, and repeated false starts. Knowledge is being formed, and is not organized well enough to be presented clearly and concisely. When students speak this way, they are sharing and experimenting with their understanding of

[1]Barnes (1992) and Barnes, Britton, & Rosen (1969) studied the verbal communication techniques of twelve and thirteen year-old students during small group discussions. The groups that were most successful at completing tasks were the ones that listened to one another and built on each others' comments. They engaged more in "exploratory talk" when developing their understanding.

information. When the organization and understanding improves, the speech moves to its more formal and "final draft" form. At this point, talking becomes the manner by which students present their understanding to the teacher and classmates. When this process is allowed in class, students literally talk to help them understand, then talk to present their understanding. Barnes described the usefulness of both types of talk:

> The distinction between exploratory and final draft (talk) is essentially a distinction between different ways in which speech can function in the rehearsing of knowledge. In exploratory talk and writing, the learner himself takes responsibility for the adequacy of his thinking; final-draft talk and writing looks toward external criteria and distant, unknown audiences. Both uses of language have their place in education (p. 113-114).

Discussion also serves to unite the cognitive and the "social aspects" of the classroom. Cazden's (1988) use of the term social refers to an orientation to "the Other" (p. 131). By this she means that immediate feedback is available to whatever is said. If it is unclear or controversial, the "others" listening will inform the speaker. Understanding is critical during discussion. Discussants, thus, become very conscious of those with whom they are discussing, and present ideas with the social awareness that others are listening.

The characteristics of classroom discussion show it to be a very different method of instruction than recitation. A persistence of recitation, or the use of recitation under the guise of discussion, has a direct impact on the type of instruction students will receive. Confusing discussion with other types of classroom interactions will not allow for the social and cognitive benefits that have been credited to discussion with these characteristics.

Summary of the Section

In this section I compared and contrasted discussion and recitation. Both of these methods of instruction require classroom interaction, but serve very different purposes. Distinctions were needed because recitation often occurs in classrooms under the guise of discussion. When this happens, the educational benefits specific to discussion are muddled. After distinguishing between recitation and discussion, I provided rationales for using discussion as a method of instruction. These rationales support discussion as a useful teaching technique for developing higher order thinking skills, exposing students to differing points of view, building knowledge, and uniting the cognitive and the "social aspects" of the classroom.

Problem Two: The Decline of Discussion Among Democratic Citizens

A second concern related to discussion has to do with the lack of public talk among democratic citizens. This lack of verbal interaction may be detrimental to a democratic society, causing it to weaken. In this section I will explore this concern first by describing the general idea of democratic citizenship. Following this, I propose discussion skills that democratic citizens may need to have if they are to engage in fruitful public discussions about important issues, and I describe possible characteristics of public, democratic discussions. Finally, I suggest the use of public schools for teaching discussion skills, and the classroom for providing an arena to learn how to engage in public discussions.

Democratic Citizenship

Democratic societies that are governed by and for the people are dynamic and changing as they struggle to become representative political systems. Each generation of citizens faces unique societal problems that must be solved. Citizens, therefore, need to be prepared to examine, critique, and when needed, change current practices to insure that their democracy continuously addresses the needs of the people. Parker (1996) is direct:

(V)iewed as a creative, constructive process, democracy

> is not already accomplished, needing only protection, but a path that citizens in a pluralist society try to walk together. It is...this commitment that unites them, not a culture, language, or religion (p. 191).

Engle and Ochoa (1988) provide a similar view:

> Democracy is never completed. There are no final solutions, no unquestioned answers. Instead democracy is characterized by a constant striving for improvement, a belief that it is possible to improve the quality of life for all. In this respect, democracy is to be contrasted with authoritarian systems that allow no variations except those that suit the ruling elite at the top and that discourage questioning, depreciate the importance of new information, and insist on the strict obedience of the citizen to the ruling class. The strength of democracy lies in its openness, its responsiveness to new information and new conditions, and its fostering of questioning and of dissent (p. 10).

Citizens who take a democratic system of government for granted, along with the civic responsibility that is inherent in it, may weaken the system. Interacting with others to question, construct, and adjust a democracy is replaced with defending current practices. Two indicators that society's commitment to furthering democracy is weakening are a willingness to reduce citizen involvement by relinquishing power to elected representatives, and an increasingly

privatized society. They are indicators because both reduce interactions among citizens.

In democracies, citizens who merely elect others to govern them often waive their own involvement in public discussions about issues and policies. Too often citizens are content to remain in the privacy of their homes or businesses and allow elected officials to represent them. Involvement in the "democratic process" quickly is reduced to voting. While the act of voting is one of many important roles of a citizen, it does not make a citizen. Also needed is a willingness and ability to interact with others about issues that are important to a democratic society. Democratic citizens need to participate in what Barber (1989) calls "self governance" (p. 355). Self governing citizens engage in "public forms of thinking, and participate thoughtfully in the whole spectrum of civic activities" (p. 355). These activities include:

> debate and deliberation on policy...serving in local and regional civic and political offices (PTAs, planning boards, town councils, neighborhood associations, community boards, arbitration panels, and juries), supporting and working for political parties and public interest groups, as well as voting...(C)itizens must also learn how to engage in political or public talk, which is quite different from engaging in private talk, scientific talk, and many other useful--though

> comparatively private--forms of conversation. Political talk is talk in common among a community of citizens about common issues--the public good, for example (p. 355).

Without this type of talk, members of a society begin to raise the values of individualism over the common good. They become focused on individual rights and individual interests. Opportunities for public talk occur less frequently, and when they do, talk is focused on individual rights.

While the guarantee of individual rights is a cornerstone of democracy in the United States, Glendon (1991) claims that Americans have become enmeshed in "rights talk." By this she means they cling to the value of individualism and defend only their own points of view:

> The rights mentality, (marked by) its legalistic character, its absoluteness, its hyperindividualism, its insultary, and its silence with respect to personal, civic, and collective responsibility...[seeps] into spheres of American society where a sense of personal responsibility and of civic obligation traditionally have been nourished" (Glendon, 1991, cited in Rosenblum, 1994, p. 95).

At its extreme, a focus on individual rights prevents thinking about society or community concerns. One fails to think how exerting individual rights might impact a community because the focus of the thinking is on the self. In the

multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society of America, citizens must go beyond arguing only their perspectives and only entering the pubic sphere to debate their rights.

Citizenship and Discussion Skills

Discussion provides one of many possible ways for citizens to interact. A central characteristic of a democratic community, in addition to the free election of representatives, is the formulation of policy through free and open discussion (Bridges, 1987). Such discussions can be characterized by "creativity, variety, openness and flexibility, inventiveness, capacity for discovery, eloquence, potential for empathy and affective expression" (Barber, 1989, p. 355). Discussion with these characteristics becomes a process that promotes understanding and improved perspectives on issues (Mathews, 1994; Parker, 1996).

The connection of discussion to democratic processes and to citizenship is not new. Over fifty years ago, Dewey (1939) wrote that the "democratic method is persuasion through public discussion carried on not only in legislative halls but in the press, private conversations, and public assemblies...[it] is an expression of the will to substitute the method of discussion for the method of coercion" (p. 128). Similarly, Lucas (1976) declared that democratic decisions are only possible after full and fair discussions

in which multiple sides of an issue are examined, and those with ideas or contributions have had their say.

This notion of discussion implies that the very act of discussing requires participants to interact in a particular and structured manner. These structured interactions will likely be different from interactions during debates or arguments. As Bridges (1987) states:

> discussion require(s) us to set aside...feelings of hostility or affection towards a member of a group in order to pay proper attention to the merits or demerits of what he or she is actually saying...(For example), I can appreciate the value of strangers' contributions to a discussion without knowing anything about their social or economic standing or their relationships with familiar friends (p. 36).

If citizens are to engage in discussions that allow for the development of opinions and positions on issues common to a group, then competence in the skills of discussion is required. Why do public discussions of important issues affecting families, communities, and nation infrequently occur? No simple answer is possible. However, one of the many reasons for a lack of talk could be that citizenship does not require the skill or the "know how" to engage in public talk about important policies or issues (Barber, 1989, 1984). Possible discussion skills include listening, clearly making claims, supporting claims with facts, helping a group

move through obstacles, critiquing ideas and not individuals (keeping a high respect for human dignity), and developing together a shared understanding of the problem or issue (Barber, 1984; Mathews, 1994; Parker, 1996). If skill in discussion can enhance public talk among democratic citizens, then identifying discussion skills is needed.

Characteristics of Talk Among Democratic Citizens

Barber (1989) developed four characteristics of talk that he believed were necessary for citizens in a democracy. I will outline them to provide an overview of how democratic citizens might engage in discussions. First, citizens need skill at listening with an ear to considering opposing opinions. This type of listening does not mean to merely tolerate opposing comments in order to identify weaknesses or points of disagreement (as in debate or argument). Discussants listen to identify commonalities and genuinely attempt to understand alternative points. Second, talk needs to be thought of as an affective, as well as cognitive, mode of communication. Talk is not devoid of emotion. Through talk, communities are built and destroyed. Talk needs to be thought of as not only a logical and rational form of communication, but also as a way to present "rituals, symbols, myths, expressions...and a hundred other quiet and noisy manifestations of our common humanity" (p. 356). The third characteristic of democratic talk is that talk is

viewed as a way to participate and act in society. Public talk provides citizens with the ability to invent, create and construct. Talking *about* something is not the intention; this is merely reflection. Instead, talking is thought of as a way to make, or remake, society. Finally, implicit in each of these is the idea that the talk is public, not private. Public talk can only occur in public settings, where citizens consider, together, issues that they hold in common. Thought of this way, citizens do not only ask "what do I want," but they also ask "what will benefit the community."

When citizens interact through talk, they enter a public arena. Talking with other citizens is not all that is needed in an ever-evolving democracy. The verbal interactions should be structured so citizens are able to present multiple perspectives on an issue, consider alternative points, and recognize the political power that is available through public discussions.

Possibilities of Classroom Discussion in Democracies

The educational systems of democratic societies serve a vital role in developing discussion abilities in children. Bridges (1987) is direct:

> (I)t seems reasonable to expect that an education which is intended, among other things perhaps, to initiate young people into (democratic) processes should include preparation in the art of discussion or more

> specifically those forms of discussion associated with the processes of deliberation and decision making (p. 35).

The classroom, thought of as a laboratory of democracy (Dewey, 1916), holds the potential for students of different race, gender, social status, and ability to learn how to engage one another in discussions about issues of common concern. The classroom is an appropriate location to develop democratic character because it can become what Rosenblum (1994) calls a "diverse social identity group":

> (D)emocratic character is said to be formed in diverse social identity groups...these groups forge an inclusive democratic community. The thought is not that social and cultural group differences...must be tolerated; rather, they are positive forces for democratic character and commitment in their members (p. 87).

While any subject area may use discussion, Gross and Zeleny (1958) emphasized the specific role of social studies in teaching classroom discussion: "Since adult organizations so often make decisions with respect to policy by means of the discussion method it is difficult for a teacher of the social studies to over-emphasize (discussion techniques and procedures) in the classroom" (p. 484). Social studies, with its connection to social interaction, societal critique, and civic participation, may be the part of the school curriculum where classroom discussion is most appropriately used by

teachers (Engle & Ochoa, 1988).

Discussion may best be taught by allowing students to interact together about a concern common to them. During their interactions they practice with discussion skills and ultimately make decisions as a group. As such, they begin taking the role of democratic citizens.

Let me conclude this section by suggesting that this possibility of discussion will likely face roadblocks from current educational practices. American schools tend to ignore student diversity rather than embrace it. Student differences such as gender, ability level and language proficiency could limit the use of discussion in the classroom. Speaking in broad terms, American curricula, and corresponding methods of instruction, often best serves English speaking boys with average or high ability. The concern that girls receive less help from teachers, less encouragement to interact with the teacher or other students, and more criticism than boys is well documented (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sadker, Sadker, & Long, 1993). Additionally, average and high ability students are more likely to receive a challenging curriculum and be taught with more thought-provoking methods of instruction than low ability students (Metz, 1978, Oakes, 1985, Page, 1991). And, the tendency for most verbal interactions and written material to be in English presents potential restrictions for the increasing

number of limited English-speaking children enrolling in our schools. Equal access to an to an equal education is critical to a democratic society that desires informed interactions among its citizens. Public talk will benefit. Schools, however, are hard pressed to determine ways to both accommodate student differences and provide an equitable education to each student. Some of the benefits of schools as laboratories of democracy are not likely to be accomplished if diverse students do not interact with one another in the classroom.

Summary of Section

In this section I suggested that democratic citizens need to interact with one another. The purpose of interaction is to examine, critique, and when needed change, current practices to insure that the needs of the people are addressed. Citizens interacting in this way do not focus on their own rights only, and they move from the private to the public arena. Formulating policy through free and open discussion is a characteristic of a democracy. As such, a lack of discussion poses a threat to a democratic society. Perhaps one way to encourage interactions through discussion is to learn to use the cognitive and social skills needed during a discussion. Educational systems of democratic societies provide a means by which young citizens may be taught how to engage in discussions in the public, political

arena.

Why Examine Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion?

I now shift my focus away from discussion in relation to recitation and democratic citizenship, and focus more closely on teachers who organize, plan, and lead classroom discussions.

In this study, I examined teachers' conceptions of discussion because of the impact teachers have on instruction, curriculum, and students. Others in an educational setting could have been examined, namely administrators, students, or parents. However, the classroom teacher plays a powerful role in determining what, and how, subject matter is taught (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, 1988; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). Examining teacher thinking about discussion is important because of the diverse types of classroom interactions that teachers label as discussion (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1984, 1990; Gall & Gall, 1990; Swift & Gooding, 1983; Wilen, 1990).

Teacher Thinking and Conceptions

Teachers have been aptly labeled "gatekeepers" through which curriculum, learning experiences and classroom events pass (Thornton, 1991). Thornton identified areas where classroom curriculum and instruction were affected by teacher beliefs and conceptions. They included: subject matter

selection, beliefs about student thinking, socialization goals, and choice of instructional strategies. A teachers' belief system, or conceptual base, is considered by many to be a critical element in curricular decisions (Brophy & Good, 1974; Evans, 1988, 1989, 1990; Isenberg, 1990; Shaver, Davis, & Helburn, 1979)[2]; or, as Freeman (1993) stated, "teaching is more than behavior, it is indeed thoughtful work" (p. 485). Over sixty years ago, Beard (1934, cited in Thornton, 1991) suggested this when he stated that teachers draw from their own "frame of reference" when deciding what and how to teach:

> Since all things cannot be placed before children in the school room, there must and will be, inevitably, a selection, and the selection will be made with reference to some frame of knowledge and values, more or less consciously established in the mind of the selector (Beard, 1934, p. 182).

The actions of teachers in the classroom are influenced, even determined, by teachers' underlying thought processes (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Some researchers suggest that teachers will visualize an activity in their classroom prior to instruction to determine whether the activity will "work" in that particular educational context (Yinger & Clark,

[2]A report on "perspectives" of social studies held by pre-service elementary teachers (Goodman & Adler, 1985) also described how teacher attitudes, behaviors and beliefs gave direction to teachers' classroom practice.

1983). In a review of research on teacher thinking, Isenberg (1990) suggested that teachers' thinking may be guided by a "personally held system of beliefs, values, and principles" (p. 324). Further, teachers' reasons for selecting certain instructional strategies "may not be clearly understood until teachers try explaining their actions" (Isenberg, 1990, p. 324). Examining teachers' conceptions of discussion, rather than observing a classroom discussion, allows teachers to explain their thinking about discussion.

In their review of the literature on teachers' thought processes, Clark and Peterson (1986) provided one reason for exploring teacher thinking: "The ultimate goal of research on teachers' thought processes is to construct a portrayal of the cognitive psychology of teaching" (p. 255). They continued, suggesting that these portrayals might be useful for "educational theorists, researchers, policymakers, curriculum designers, teacher educators, school administrators, and by teachers themselves" to better understand the thinking behind teaching acts (p. 255). Clark and Peterson suggested that teachers have a collection of knowledge, theories and beliefs about teaching that impacts their lesson planning and decisions prior to teaching the class, their thoughts and actions during classroom interactions, and their reflections about the teaching after the class ends. They clearly state that teachers' thought processes are critical to the act of teaching because they

make up an "adaptive array of responses to perceived task demands of the profession" (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p 292).

Researchers who explore cognitive processes suggest that people follow particular mental models when thinking and making decisions (Bruer, 1993; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Johnson-Laird, 1983). Mental models have also been described as implicit theories that are held by people to help solve problems and make decisions (Herbert & Dionne, 1993). If this is true for people in general, then we can assume that teachers likely have mental models for planning lessons, instructing, and reflecting on lessons once they are taught (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Perhaps teachers follow a particular mental process when considering the use of discussion as a method of instruction. Examining their thinking about discussion may show what teachers consider when deciding whether or not discussion is a viable method of instruction in the classroom.

Research on discussion in social studies revealed that the primary mode of data collection when examining discussion was through observations of classroom discussions (Wilen & White, 1991). Teacher thoughts or ideas were not examined. Understanding teachers' thinking about discussion is a needed step in discussion research if we assume that teachers' thoughts underlie their classroom action. If classrooms are to be a practice ground for learning how to discuss, and if discussion is to be used as a way to help students construct

knowledge, then teachers are a crucial variable in creating such a context.[3] To understand more about how and why discussion is used as a method of instruction, teacher thinking needs to be more fully understood.

Problems arise when examining teachers' thinking, since this type of research depends on verbal self-reports. Self-reports have been criticized for their validity and reliability (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Various methods of inquiry, however, have been used to increase the validity and reliability of self reports (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Shavelson, Webb & Burstein, 1986). When describing my research methodology (Chapter 3), I describe how I attempted to reduce concerns about teachers' self-reports during data collection.

Prior Research on Teachers' Conceptions

Prior research has examined teachers' conceptions in areas such as teaching (Pratt, 1992), the role of the teacher (Nier, 1976), and student intelligence (Fry, 1984). Research specific to social studies has examined teachers' conceptions of history (Evans, 1988, 1989, 1990), teaching United States history (Thornton, 1991), teaching social studies (Fichtman-Dana, 1993), historical knowledge (Wilson & Wineburg, 1988),

[3]For example, if teachers only think of discussion as a recitative interaction between teacher and student, then recommendations for using discussion to develop democratic citizenship abilities would be futile.

and justice (Makler, 1993). Social studies teachers' conceptions of discussion have not been explored. Exploring teachers' conceptions of classroom discussion should provide insights related to the presence, absence, and character of discussion in schools. The following statement by Wood and Wood (1988) reveals how a study about teachers' conceptions of discussion might provide additional insight into the uses of discussion in the classroom:

> And what is discussion anyway? A precise definition which we can all agree upon seems to be extremely elusive. Teachers, dissatisfied with the incessant "chalk and talk" routine, have turned to more interactive modes of teaching for at least some of the day. If we could specify exactly what teachers hope to achieve in these sessions, then we might be able to devise evaluation procedures to measure how far these aims had in fact been fulfilled. How and why do teachers choose a discussion as opposed to paper and pencil tests, essays, lectures, or set reading, etc. (p. 295)?

Exploring teachers' conceptions of discussion should provide answers to these questions, and provide insight about discussion for teachers, teacher educators, and future discussion research.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was:

> What are teachers' conceptions of discussion in high school social studies classes?

In addition, this study examined four ancillary questions:

> Do teachers have more than one conception of discussion?
>
> What characteristics do teachers consider typical of classroom discussions?
>
> What purposes do teachers believe classroom discussions serve?
>
> What factors seem to influence teachers' use of discussion?

Definition of Terms

This section provides definitions for major terms that appear in the literature review, methods section, findings, and conclusions of this dissertation. They are listed alphabetically.

Conception

In this study, a conception is a mental picture that has critical attributes (Ehrenberg, 1981; Taba, 1966). Conceptions consist of images, ideas, characteristics, and beliefs about something, and are generalized from particular

instances (Elbaz, 1983, 1991; Taba, 1966). For example, a conception of classroom discussion is the mental picture that a teacher forms when thinking about discussion. Conceptions of discussion are derived from ideas, images, and characteristics that teachers believe are representative of particular discussions in the classroom.

Constant Comparative Method

This is a particular method of data analysis used in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The constant-comparative method involves the comparison of data during alternating stages of data collection and data analysis. New data are collected and compared with tentative categories and hypotheses that were generated from previously collected data. As a result of these comparisons, some new data are placed into existing categories, some lead to the revision of existing categories, and some generate additional categories when existing ones are insufficient. Data are collected and compared until the categories approach "theoretical saturation," a point where new data from diverse sources do not lead to revisions or the generation of additional categories.

Classroom Discussion

Wilen and White (1991) provide an adequate working definition: Classroom discussion is a "structured

conversation in which participants work cooperatively to present, examine, compare, and understand often diverse views about an academic topic or issue" (p. 492).

Grounded Theory

This describes the inductive method of analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) that was used in this study. The purpose of grounded theory is to generate hypotheses that are based on, or grounded in, data. These hypotheses are not developed before the collection and analysis of data, rather they emerge from the data as it is coded and analyzed. (see also Constant Comparative Method)

Instructional Method

Instructional method refers to the way teachers present information to their students. For example, "lecture," "cooperative groupwork," or "discussion" name three different instructional methods. Often, the name precedes the word "method," as in the "lecture method," or the "discussion method."

Recitation

Recitation is a teacher-dominated type of classroom interaction that is often compared with discussion. It typically follows a three-step pattern: 1) the teacher initiates the interaction by asking a question or requesting

a response to a statement; 2) student(s) respond to the request; 3) the teacher evaluates the response and provides feedback to the student(s) about the "correctness" of the response (Bellack et al., 1966; Gall & Gall, 1990; Wilen & White, 1991).

Summary of Chapter One

My purpose in this first chapter was to provide background for examining teachers' conceptions of discussion. I introduced one primary and one secondary problem in relation to discussion: The persistence of recitation over discussion as a method of instruction, and the decline of public discussion among democratic citizens. For the first problem I explicated the concern that recitation often replaces discussion in classrooms, even though teachers and educational reformers herald discussion as a useful and beneficial form of classroom interaction. I compared discussion and recitation, and provided rationales for using classroom discussion. For the second problem, I suggested that democracies weaken when their citizens stop verbally interacting about issues they face in common. I then explored discussion as a possible way out of this weakened state, and the classroom as a fertile ground for developing and practicing discussion skills.

In the third section of chapter one, I explained why examining teachers' conceptions of discussion is a fruitful

area for study. In the fourth section, I presented the main research question and four ancillary questions. Finally, I provided definitions for terms used in the study.

Overview of the Dissertation

In chapter two, I review the literature relevant to the study. I begin by reviewing prominent literature reviews on classroom discussion. I follow this with descriptions of discussion guidelines by scholars who recommend discussion as a method of instruction. Next I describe empirical studies that pertain to my research questions. I then review the contributions that the field of speech communication has made to discussion leadership, and I suggest how an exploration of teachers' conceptions of discussion might benefit from this area of research. I conclude the chapter by showing that teachers' conceptions of discussion have not been examined, and is a necessary next step in discussion research.

Chapter three details the qualitative method by which I answered the research questions, both in theory and as it was used in my research. I describe, and provide rationales for, my data source, collection strategy, and method of analysis. I also provide an illustration of the analytic process I followed. The illustration recounts how one conception of discussion emerged from the data.

Chapter four presents the findings. These are presented as hypotheses, along with segments of field notes,

quotations, explanations of the coding process, and other forms of data displays as evidence for the hypotheses. Chapter four has two sections. The first section focuses on teachers' conceptions of discussion. I describe six conceptions. The second section focuses on factors that influence teachers' use of these conceptions of discussion. I describe five factors.

Chapter five concludes the dissertation by suggesting what has been learned from the findings. I explore three areas of insight. I then examine the limitations of this study, and I suggest implications of the findings for teachers, teacher educators and researchers. Finally, I provide a summary of the dissertation.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

In the first chapter I described a concern that recitation persists in classrooms under the guise of discussion. I also explored classroom discussion in relation to democratic citizenship education. I followed this by explaining how exploring teachers' conceptions of discussion might provide insight about teacher thinking that could then be used to address these concerns. I then presented my research questions and definitions of major terms in this study.

In this chapter I review the literature that is relevant to my study. To that end, I have divided this chapter into five sections. In the first section I examine prior reviews of classroom discussion research, seeking to reveal current research findings and theories about definitions, purposes, and characteristics of the discussion method as they relate to teachers. In the next section I explore ten sets of guidelines for using discussion in classrooms. The guidelines recommend how to teach with discussion, and suggest how teachers might plan, implement, and monitor classroom discussion. In the third section I review four empirical studies on teaching with discussion. Though these studies do not address teachers' conceptions directly, they provide insight into teachers' thinking about discussion, and they suggest methods for examining teachers' conceptions of

discussion. In the fourth section I examine research on discussion outside of the classroom. Leading discussion is not only explored in educational research. Researchers in the field of speech communication have also studied the role of discussion leaders, and their work will inform this study. In the final section I suggest that it is unclear what teachers in general, and social studies teachers in particular, think constitutes a classroom discussion. It is also unclear what factors might influence teachers' use of particular conceptions of discussions, or what they intend to accomplish by using discussion. The research reviewed in this chapter reveal what is known about teaching with discussion, but also reveal a gap in the discussion literature about teachers' conceptions. The research questions I asked sought to narrow this gap by exploring social studies teachers' thinking about classroom discussion, with the intention of identifying influences, characteristics, and purposes of discussion.

Prior Reviews of Classroom Discussion

This section summarizes the conclusions of prior literature reviews pertaining to my study. These reviews identified definitions, purposes, and characteristics of classroom discussion. I summarize three prior literature reviews of classroom discussion: Gall and Gall (1976); Gall (1985); and, Wilen and White (1991). Some research reports

were cited in more than one of these reviews. To avoid redundancy, I present those research findings only once.

Literature Reviews by Gall and Gall (1976) and Gall (1985)[4]

Gall and Gall (1976) began their review of the literature by presenting the irony that teachers talk too much, and students too little, during classroom discussions, even though reduced teacher talk and increased student talk are two distinctive attributes of the discussion method. They explored research literature on discussion group dynamics and on the effectiveness of teaching with the discussion method. They then offered tentative answers to the questions "Why should I use the discussion method? When? How? And with whom?" (1976, p. 167). In both reviews, the Galls defined discussion as "a group of persons, usually in the roles of moderator-leader and participant, [that] assembles at a designated time and place, to communicate interactively, using speaking, nonverbal, and listening processes, in order to achieve instructional objectives" (Gall & Gall, 1976, p. 169; Gall, 1985, p. 1423). Their definition highlights the fact that discussion is a group activity, and that group communication is imperative for instruction and student learning.

[4]I summarize these two reviews as if they were one because they make the same arguments. Gall (1985) confirms the findings of his earlier review (Gall & Gall, 1976) with some updated research.

From research in the field of social psychology, Gall and Gall (1976) identified five factors that hinder or facilitate group dynamics: size, heterogeneity, cohesiveness, eye contact, and leadership. When teachers consider these factors, they are better able to have classroom discussions that promote in their students subject matter mastery, problem-solving skills, and moral development. I will briefly describe each factor.

1. Size. Research on the size of discussion groups revealed smaller numbers of participants increased student involvement and the overall effectiveness of the discussion group. While recommended sizes for groups ranged from two to twenty members (with about five being ideal), the important implication was that teachers needed to be aware that larger discussion groups could result in decreased student involvement.

2. Heterogeneity. Discussions were more effective when group members were different rather than similar. In other words, heterogeneous groups may lead to a more educative discussion than homogeneous groups. With heterogeneous groups, different perspectives and a range of talents are offered during the discussions. While interpersonal conflicts are more likely to arise, they can be overcome if the group identifies them

and determines a plan for overcoming them, and if the group is given time to continue working together.

3. Cohesiveness. Group cohesiveness (how well group members worked together) was found to be a desirable trait of a discussion group. However, some concern was raised that a highly cohesive group might reject or ignore minority or alternative ideas. Groups needed cohesion to assist interactions, but not so much that different perspectives and attitudes would be neglected.

4. Eye contact. Communication patterns in groups improved and participation expanded when group members were positioned to have eye contact with each other, and when the teacher did not use his or her role as "teacher" to dominate the discussion.

5. Leadership. Leadership was necessary for discussion groups to be effective, but the leader did not have to be the teacher. In fact, most research indicates that an authoritative, instructor-centered leadership style was detrimental to student learning.

Discussion groups provide unique ways for students to learn. Gall (1985) suggested that group members have a

reciprocal influence on one another; each student "is affected by the behavior of other students in the group. Other teaching methods, such as lecture and computer-assisted instruction, are much less dependent on reciprocal influences among students to facilitate learning" (p. 1423). Gall cautioned that as a result of this reciprocity discussion can easily degenerate into a superficial exchange of student opinions and ideas. The discussion must stay focused on a specific purpose.

Gall (1985) presented three reasons why the "discussion method" is not easily or frequently incorporated in classroom instruction: 1) teachers lack training in discussion leadership skills; 2) teachers resist activities that give control to the students, fearing that classroom order will degenerate, especially with large classes; 3) Teachers whose curriculum emphasizes the acquisition of facts and skills may believe that discussion is less suited to meet these objectives than lecture, recitation or mastery learning approaches. Both Gall and Gall (1976) and Gall (1985) recommended that the discussion method of instruction be implemented, although they called for more research to examine how teachers plan to use discussions and how best to encourage them to implement it in their classrooms.

Literature Review by Wilen and White (1991)

Wilen and White's (1991) review of the literature

explored interaction patterns in social studies classrooms, and they found that recitation was the most common form of discourse there. According to Wilen and White's review, most teachers are comfortable with recitation, and view it as an effective method for presenting factual information to students. Since most social studies curricula emphasize facts, it is no wonder that teachers have a strong dependence on recitation. Wilen and White's review went beyond recitation, however, and also examined research literature on discussion. I will focus on the classroom discussion portion of their review, and on the four basic forms of classroom discussion they identified in the literature.

Wilen and White (1991) reported that teachers and scholars share the basic assumption that classroom discussion is a favorable method of instruction. Social studies teachers often claim that discussion is a beneficial alternative to recitation. However, their review found that very little research has examined discussion itself to prove or disprove this assumption. Further, attempts to specify the defining characteristics of classroom discussions (e.g., student/teacher roles, student/teacher expectations from discussion, interactions during discussion, appropriate subject matter to be discussed) reveal that a great variety of classroom interactions are labeled "discussion."

Though educators use the term discussion to describe all manner of classroom interactions among students and teachers,

most of them typically begin with the teacher posing a broad question or statement to the class. Wilen and White's review found that most classroom lessons do not consist of pure forms of either recitation or discussion, and often discussions occur in the midst of recitation. When this happens, student interest increases, the length of utterances by both the students and the teacher increases and students begin addressing each other, rather than the teacher only.

Wilen and White identified four forms of discussion in the classroom: inquiry, critical thinking, exploratory talk, responsive teaching. During an inquiry discussion, ideas were analyzed logically and systemically, leading to the identification and clarification of possible solutions and hypotheses. Researchers, however, disagree on the amount of student learning from inquiry lessons. Findings are inconsistent. Generally, however, inquiry has been found to be as effective as other methods of instruction (e.g., lecture) for teaching course content.

The second form of discussion, critical thinking, is the one most often associated with classroom discourse. Here the teacher and students moved beyond background information and factual accounts, and both teacher and students raised questions and interacted verbally as they supported their arguments and conclusions. Often teachers encouraged critical thinking as they discussed controversial issues with their students, and encouraged them to take a position on an

issue and then tell it to the class. The teacher then probed the students' thinking by asking questions that encouraged each individual to examine the "clarity, relevancy, and consistency of their position" (Wilen & White, 1991, p. 491).

The third form of discussion was exploratory talk,[5] used when students first begin exploring an idea. They are to connect "old" knowledge--information that they acquired from personal experiences and earlier social studies lessons--with new information presented in their textbooks or during class sessions. Eventually, they confirmed or revised their previous ideas, and spoke with a more polished, "final draft" form of talk. The process of talking about the information was credited for increases in student understanding of content.

The fourth form of discussion was responsive teaching. Following Vygotsky's (1978) theory of a "zone of proximal development," teachers used discussion to encourage social interactions among students, and "stretch" student thinking so they could develop higher levels of understanding. Teachers were responsive to their students' different levels of knowledge, and used four strategies during discussions to increase students' understanding: Questioning students' comprehension, summarizing information, clarifying details,

[5]Wilen and White (1991) only cited research by Barnes (1976/1992), and Barnes, Britten, and Rosen's (1969) work with twelve- and thirteen-year-old students. I briefly presented their findings in Chapter One under the section "Rationales for Using Classroom Discussion."

and predicting events. When teachers responded to students, and interacted with them through discussion, student performance and test scores increased.

Inquiry and exploratory talk were often driven by student-initiated questions. Because these questions, and their answers, were not necessarily known by the teachers in advance, Wilen and White suggested the teacher's relationship with students was as a "collaborator more than an evaluator" (p. 492). Discussion that encouraged critical thinking gave students the opportunity to find their own solutions to problems, and to develop their own support for their solutions. During responsive teaching, discussion was a tool for students to construct their own understanding of new information.

Summary and Relevance of Prior Literature Reviews

In this section I explored prior literature reviews of classroom discussion. Classroom discussion is described as an effective method of instruction for interacting with subject matter at a high cognitive level. These reviews showed that teachers and researchers labeled a wide range of classroom interactions as discussion. For example, question-and-answer sessions during lectures are likely to be labeled "discussion" even though very little opportunity is available for interaction between the teacher and student or among students.

Literature reviews revealed that discussion produced uneasiness in teachers about relinquishing "control" of the lesson to students, and concern about teaching a specific curriculum in a predetermined time period. These factors led teachers to use less interactive methods of instruction. The reviews of discussion literature did not identify teacher thinking about discussion characteristics. They did not reveal teacher thinking about which aspects of discussion cause concern about losing control of the classroom, or what characteristics of discussion cause them to see it as ineffectual for teaching a curriculum emphasizing facts and skills.

Most of the data used in discussion research was gathered from observations of classroom discussions. Interviews with teachers and students rarely occurred, and were usually to clarify what happened during an observed discussion. Researchers have examined neither teachers' conceptions of discussion, nor teachers' thinking about potential factors that could influence classroom discussion. One question that my study asked was whether teachers had more than one conception of discussion. That question intended to explore the possibility that teacher thinking about discussion was complex, and to determine whether conceptions of discussion remained consistent in different contexts (i.e., if they were flexible). In the next section, richer and more specific descriptions of how to teach with

discussion are provided. I explore recommended guidelines for using discussion in the classroom.

Guidelines for Teaching with Discussion

In this section, I draw from the literature ten sets of guidelines for using discussion in classrooms. I am calling these "guidelines" because they provide specific direction, or guidance, for teachers who use discussion in their classrooms. These guidelines were developed both from empirical studies of classroom discussion and from individual theorizing about classroom discussion. For organizational purposes, I have divided them into three sub-sections: 1) necessary and sufficient conditions for discussion (Bridges, 1979, 1987; Costa, 1990; Haroutunian-Gordon, 1991; Miller, 1990, 1992); 2) teacher questioning during classroom discussion (Dillon, 1994; Hunkins, 1995; Hyman & Whitford, 1990; Roby, 1988); 3) and discussion of public and controversial issues (Kelly, 1986, 1989; Oliver & Newmann, 1972). These sections are relevant to my study because they provide more than a definition of discussion. They begin to address specific characteristics of discussion, and teacher and student roles in discussions.

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Discussion

Here I review four sets of guidelines that describe necessary and sufficient conditions for classroom discussion:

David Bridges' (1979, 1987) three criteria for discussion, Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon's five criteria for "successful" discussions, Arthur Costa's five categories of necessary teacher behaviors during discussion, and the four principles in Suzanne Miller's (1992) idea of discussion as a "Dialogic Pedagogy."

Bridges (1987) theorized that there were three defining conditions needed for discussion. I quoted him extensively below because he provided a brief description of each condition, followed by a parenthetical explanation of why each was needed:

1. [Discussion] involves members of the group contributing from their different perspectives, opinions or understanding. (You can't have a discussion if everybody is saying the same thing or nobody is saying anything).
2. [Discussion] involves a general disposition on behalf of members of the group to listen to, to consider and be responsive to what others are saying. (You can't have a discussion if the members of the group are unwilling or unable to listen).
3. [Discussion] is guided by the central purpose of developing the group's knowledge, understanding and/or judgement on the matter under discussion. (I am therefore distinguishing this kind of

> enterprise from group talk..., from purely dilettante conversation, from negotiation of power, from debate aimed exclusively at winning votes or defeating one's adversary, from group therapy--none of which is guided by this central purpose) (p. 34).

According to Bridges, discussion must be a rule-governed, structured activity. When it is, the process of discussing encourages collaborative and exploratory development of hypotheses, the pooling of ideas and information, and the illumination of alternative perspectives. It also develops students' skills in criticism and argument. Thought of in this manner, the three necessary and sufficient conditions for discussion provide a set of general rules, a disposition, and a structure to classroom discussion.

Haroutunian-Gordon (1991) developed five criteria for "successful" classroom discussions. Her criteria were developed from participant observations of classroom discussions about scenes from Romeo and Juliet. The discussions occurred in two classes: an advanced placement high school English class in a private school, and a special education high school English class in an urban public school. Students in the first classroom were accustomed to discussing literature, while students in the second were not. The five criteria for successful discussions were:

1. All the participants follow predetermined rules of discussion (e.g., listening to others, taking turns).
2. The discussion generates new ideas about the topic.
3. Ideas presented in a discussion are supported in the text being discussed.
4. Participants listen and respond carefully to each other's comments.
5. The discussion has an identifiable purpose or objective.

The teachers and researchers participating in Haroutunian-Gordon's (1991) study determined that a discussion was successful when these five criteria were present. Likewise, a discussion was a failure when one or more of the five criteria were missing.

Costa (1990) described five types of teacher behaviors that "invite, maintain and enhance students' discussions in classroom settings" (p. 45). Relying on research findings from cognitive psychology for support, Costa aspired to guide teacher behaviors so they might help their students learn how to become better participants in discussions. The behaviors are:

1. Structuring the classroom. Teachers control classroom environmental resources such as time, space, human energy, and materials, and should

arrange their classroom so students can easily engage in group discussions. For example, different seating arrangements are needed for small group discussions and large group discussions. The amount of time available for a discussion (i.e., the length of the class period) needs to be considered prior to the discussion; students need adequate time if they are to become actively engaged. Teachers must clearly state "ground rules," purposes, and goals of a discussion to legitimate its use in the mind of the students. To help students become familiar and comfortable with discussion, teachers should plan for classroom experiences with teacher-led questions, dialogues in pairs or trios, and cooperative group learning. The classroom should have an overall structure that develops skills at participating in discussion.

2. Questioning students to challenge their thinking. Teachers' questions serve to challenge and focus students' attention on the topic being discussed. Questions are hierarchical, and function at three levels: collecting and recollecting facts; connecting and processing factual information into meaningful relationships; and hypothesizing, imagining, and predicting different situations

based on the information already acquired. The goal is to reach the third level, but each level must be addressed during discussions.

3. Responding in such a way as to create a climate for discussion. Teacher responses to comments or ideas need to create an environment in which students feel safe to take risks. Teacher responses should accept student responses and ideas, clarify and explore concepts, ideas, or terminology used by students that are vague or unclear, and provide additional information about a topic.

4. Enhancing metacognitive awareness of discussion behaviors. Teachers should help students become aware of their behaviors during discussion. By doing so, students learn to "monitor" their discussion skills so they can evaluate the productivity of a discussion, determine whether predetermined criteria for effective discussions are met, and consider more efficient behaviors that might be used in future discussions. In short, teachers reveal to students how they evaluate discussions so students become more self-aware of their own discussion skills and abilities.

5. Modeling desirable discussion behaviors. Teachers

> must be aware that students will imitate teacher-behaviors during discussions, and that their behavior strongly influences their students' actions and reactions during discussion. Behaviors such as accepting different cultures, values, and points of view; empathizing with ideas and feelings of others; listening; and expressing enthusiasm toward the subject matter--are all suggested as desirable for teachers to project to students.

Miller (1992) described discussion as a "dialogic pedagogy," defined as "a conversational teaching approach in which the teacher and students engage in purposeful collaboration, guiding and inviting each other in talk and activity" (p. 1). Her model for a dialogic pedagogy was developed in five secondary-level schools where she observed discussions in ten literature classrooms throughout a school year. She also interviewed students and teachers about the purpose of discussion and the roles played by participants in a discussion. The main thrust of Miller's work was on identifying "the right atmosphere for discussion" (p. 4). Miller presented four principles that teachers must follow if they are to arouse student responses and reflections during classroom discussions. The following list is hierarchical. Each principle must be followed before successive ones may be attempted:

1. The teacher's stance toward texts must accept multiple responses and interpretations. The teacher does not function as the "text authority," but encourages students to respond to and question each other as they examine their own meanings.
2. Teachers must value different ideas, and provide strategies for students to consider them. During discussions, differences are likely to arise. Teachers need to promote collaborative reflection about alternative perspectives and interpretations.
3. During discussions, teachers need to model appropriate ways for challenging and questioning others' responses. By modeling strategies during discussions, teachers enable their students to challenge both their own, and others,' logic and thinking.
4. Teachers need to monitor their students' ability to raise their own questions and pursue understandings about the text. As they become more efficient at this, the teacher's guidance must gradually diminish.

Teacher Questioning During Discussion

Teacher questioning and classroom discussion were closely related categories in the literature. The use of

questions was a powerful determinant of whether classroom interactions were discussions or recitations. In this subsection I first explicate guidelines for using questions during discussion that were presented by James T. Dillon (1994) and Francis Hunkins (1995). I then describe Ronald Hyman and Ellen Whitford's (1990) five types of discussion strategies, in each of which the teacher's questions lead students toward predetermined outcomes. Finally, I include a five-level model of discussion by James Roby (1988). While Roby's model does not offer explicit guidelines for classroom discussions, I included it here because its excellent description of the influence that different types of teacher questioning had on discussion.

Dillon has examined questioning and discussion for many years (1981, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1994). His most recent book, Using Discussion in Classrooms (1994), united his prior examinations of classroom questioning and discussion. Dillon used five transcripts from high school classroom discussions to illustrate how questioning during discussion could be incorporated into a classroom. He suggested that the teacher's behavior in discussion is "far less didactic, directive, controlling, and instructional, and more suited to exemplifying and facilitating" (p. 59) than other teacher-dominated methods of instruction. To this end, he suggested that classroom discussions should be comprised of five successive "phases," each of which concentrates on a

different component of teacher questioning. While the teacher initially leads the class through these phases, the eventual goal is for the students to perform them on their own. Below are descriptions of Dillon's five phases:

1. Preparing for discussion. The teacher prepares by formulating a "discussion question" on which the entire discussion will focus. The teacher then closely examines this question, identifying at least three sub-questions and at least four alternative answers to each, thus preparing to introduce at least four different viewpoints into the classroom discussion.

2. Presenting the question. The teacher tells the students the question and also presents it to them in written form. The teacher then identifies new terms and vocabulary, and explains why the question is an important one to ask. The teacher then asks the class to clarify their understanding of the question, and "falls silent" and waits expectantly for some student to begin speaking.

3. Addressing the question. The principal task of the teacher at this phase is to help students address the question, rather than provide an answer. Students are encouraged to tell either what they know about the question or explain what the question means to them.

4. Exchanging over the question. During this phase, the teacher encourages students to speak, listen, and respond to the discussion question. Teachers use statements, non-verbal signals, student questions, and silence to promote student talk. Teacher questioning during this phase is minimized. The emphasis should be on answering the discussion question. The teacher participates in the discussion, models respect for others, and keeps the discussion focused on the question.
5. Concluding the discussion period. In drawing the discussion to a close at some point towards the end of the class session, the teacher should summarize the discussion, reflecting on the major points and the present status of the group in relation to it. The teacher invites ideas from students, and helps them identify individual and class questions for future discussion.

Hunkins has explored questioning and discussion for over 20 years. In his most recent work (1995) he described classroom discussion as a form of instructional language within the classroom that was "specialized" to enable students to attain educational objectives. He believed discussion engaged students in high-level critical and creative thinking. The degree of structure during discussions ranged from "highly structured" to "rather free

wheeling" (p. 152). The structure depended on how the teacher wanted to manage the classroom. Hunkins compared the "discussion method" with the "lecture method," "demonstration method," and "inquiry method," each of which used teacher questions differently. Four steps structured the discussion method:

1. Commencement. The teacher uses questions to gain the attention of the group, clarify the purpose of the discussion, and focus the issue.
2. Confrontation. The teacher tells students what issue they will discuss, and the procedure they will follow during the discussion (the rules). For example, they may be directed to support a particular opinion or to understand an opposing view. Students clarify the topic of the discussion and what they hope to accomplish during the discussion.
3. Challenge. "The actual discussion--issues have been identified, rules presented: now we are into interactive communication about the issue" (p. 153), during which questions are used to stimulate students' thinking. In answering questions, students raise their level of thinking to contribute ideas and information to the discussion. Ideally, discussants first assess their present knowledge level. After this

personal assessment, discussants then challenge each other by questioning each others' positions and conclusions.

4. Conclusion: The teacher asks questions to synthesize what was discussed and to set the stage for the next discussion. At this point the teacher and students try to identify whether or not they achieved consensus, exposed points of divergence, gained insight into the issue, and determined how the class interactions explored the issue.

Hyman and Whitford (1990) suggested that teachers should plan a questioning strategy that will move the discussion to an intended outcome. Teacher questions "lead students step by step to the particular policy, explanation, or problem solution...chosen as the topic for discussion" (p. 141). Though the entire set of questions must be prepared in advance, they might not all be asked by the teacher during the discussion.

Various questioning strategies lead toward specific kinds of discussions as follows:

1. Debriefing discussion. This type of discussion begins with a sharing of facts. Teachers ask their students questions that require them to recall specific facts and details. Once recalled, students are asked about possible relationships

between the facts and their own lives. The questioning strategy first identifies what students know (or debriefs them), then connects this knowledge to their own lives.

2. Problem-solving discussion. Teachers' questions help students create or find solutions to problems by having them "think through" a problem as a group. The teacher guides the students through a five-step sequence of questions: identifying the problem, determining criteria for solving the problem, generating possible solutions to the problem, considering possible consequences for each solution, and considering ways to implement each solution.

3. Explanation discussion. When teachers want students to "understand 'why' a situation, phenomenon, rule, or policy exists, an explanation discussion is appropriate" (p. 140). Teachers' questions aim to assist students in describing and analyzing the topic being discussed.

4. Predicting discussion. Teachers' questions during this type of discussion challenge students to consider the possible consequences of an action or event. The two primary questions here are "What is likely to occur?" and "What if?" Discussants build on their existing knowledge by looking to

the future and considering the effects of rules, phenomena, or actions.

5. Policy discussion. This type of discussion is used when a teacher wants students to "take a stand on a public issue" (p. 141). The primary focus is to examine questions constructed around the word "should" (e.g., What policy should we follow?). Students are to consider the pros and cons of an issue, devise solutions to problems, and determine a specific policy or action to implement. During policy discussions, the teacher continues to pose questions that encourage students to follow a rational process, consider multiple points of view, and decide on a course of action that the class advocates as a group.

Roby (1988) created a five-level model showing how teacher questioning influences classroom discussion. He evaluated the transcripts of five social studies classroom discussions at the eleventh or twelfth grade levels that had been collected for a multidisciplinary study of questioning and discussion by J. T. Dillon (1988). Roby focused on teacher questions during each discussion and suggested that the timing and type of question posed influenced the discussion that followed. His five-level model of discussion is best described as a continuum, along which are questions

ranging from recitation-style questions (what Roby called a "quiz show") to student-determined questions with no educational purpose or intended resolution (Roby's "bull session").

1. Quiz Show. Instruction is text- or teacher-centered; the teacher holds predetermined answers to the questions, and the interactions are almost exclusively centered on the teacher's values, opinions, and information.

2. Problematical Discussion. The teacher uses questions to address a puzzling problem and stimulate student interest and participation. Roby specifies three varieties of puzzling problems. "Perennial problems" cover the mysteries of life and have no final right answer. "Particular problems" are more focused and manageable than perennial problems, and they require the students and teacher to develop "the best" solution. "Cryptic problems" focus discussants on the less obvious aspects of an issue. By solving these problems, students learn to make distinctions about the issue. For example, asking what an author is trying to accomplish with a story, rather than asking what the author is literally saying, could be a question that, when answered, directs the

discussion in a more meaningful direction.

3. Informational Discussion. Questions, whether from teacher or students, verify information that supports statements made in the discussion. Opinions are not changed or challenged, but clarified. This level of discussion occurs when discussants shy away from controversy or from the feeling of vulnerability associated with expressing an individual opinion or idea about an issue.

4. Dialectical Discussion. Student and teacher questions encourage the exchange of multiple opinions and perspectives. The focus of the discussion is on articulating, comparing, and refining student and teacher opinions. This use of questioning is particularly useful for "integrating racially, socially, or religiously heterogeneous classrooms" (p. 174).

5. Bull Session. Discussions are student-centered, with everyone having their own right answer. Arguing over whose opinion is right is often the predominate activity during the class. This level is common when a class examines controversial issues, and consists primarily of "venting" pent-up emotions. Rather than having a focused conclusion, the end of the class period usually

ends this quasi-discussion.

Discussing Public and Controversial Issues

I reviewed two guidelines for using discussion in social studies classrooms to help students think about important public issues: Donald Oliver and Fred Newmann's (1972) guidelines for discussing public policy issues in the classroom, and Thomas Kelly's (1986, 1989) description of teacher roles during discussions of controversial issues.

The purpose of Oliver and Newmann's book, Taking A Stand: A Guide to Clear Discussion of Public Issues (1972) was to suggest ways for clearly and systematically discussing public policy issues in the classroom by aiming conversations "at *persuasion, problem solving* and *clarification* when discussants take a stand on public issues" (emphasis in original) (p. 6). Discussants had to think on two levels. First, they had to choose a position about an issue and think of reasons to defend it; then they had to reflect on the discussion process itself. Discussants were to ask themselves:

> Am I sensitive to what other people are saying or did I miss an important point? Do I know what the central issue is, or should I try to make it more explicit? Are we jumping around from issue to issue? Did someone change the subject without making any explicit transition? Should I challenge whether or not the new

subject is relevant to the issue we are discussing? (p. 27)

Teachers encourage students to operate on these two levels by emphasizing five guidelines for a "disciplined discussion" of a controversial issue. While the teacher provides explicit instruction about these at first, they also help students to assume more of the leadership responsibilities. The guidelines are:

1. Develop sensitivity to what the other participants are saying. Discussants must make conscious efforts to understand the issues being discussed and the points of others rather than just listening to themselves and their own arguments.
2. State the issues over which the participants agree and disagree. Discussants need to identify points of agreement and disagreement, then focus on a limited number of issues and pursue each one systematically. These issues should be stated in question form. This focuses the discussion and requires reasoning and justification from the discussants as they systematically answer each question.
3. Pursue issues systematically and with some degree of continuity. The systematic pursuit of an issue means discussing it long enough to make sure all members of a discussion group know where each one

stands. In this way, basic disagreements are clarified and resolved, rather than dealt with too quickly.

4. Make explicit the changes or transitions in the issue. When the issue being discussed is changed, it should be done with an explicit transitional statement that explains why a change of issue at that point will move the discussion forward.

5. Weigh the relevance of statements that may be off track. The discussants must determine whether a particular statement during a discussion is related to the issue under consideration. Challenging the relevance of a statement helps insure that the issues are pursued systematically and with continuity (see #3 above). It also requires the discussant making the statement to provide a transitional statement (See # 4 above).

Oliver and Newmann defined a public issue as a question that requires a choice or a decision for action by citizens or officials in affairs that concern a government or community. They specified three types of issues: moral/ethical, definitional, and factual. Each issue is resolved through structured discussions. Moral/Ethical issues are value judgements suggesting that some object, person, or conduct is "good" or "bad" based on a general moral principle; definitional issues arise when discussants

disagree about the meaning of important words or phrases in a discussion. Definitional issues are often resolved when discussants stipulate that a word or term will be used in a particular way. For example, when discussants agree to refer to an authoritative source for a definition of "homeless." Factual issues are concerned with descriptions or explanations of events. Support of factual claims come from sources such as personal observation, or reference to an authoritative source.

Kelly (1986, 1989) suggested four possible roles for social studies teachers during discussions of controversial issues: exclusive neutrality, exclusive impartiality, neutral impartiality, and committed impartiality. He claimed that only the last, committed impartiality, was a defensible teacher's role. I will summarize Kelly's descriptions and critique of each role.

1. Exclusive neutrality is a position whereby the teacher excludes any controversial topics from the course curriculum. Kelly rejects this position. He claims that important controversial issues, by definition, reflect genuine concerns within a community. By omitting controversial issues, the school sends the implicit message that the curriculum is not related to the real issues of life.
2. Exclusive partiality is a deliberate attempt to

induce students into accepting a particular position on a controversial issue. Opposing positions are ignored, poorly presented, downgraded, or merely dismissed. Discussions may appear to permit genuine dialogue and dissent, but the teacher subtly directs the discussion toward one position.[6] Kelly calls this position an "assault on the integrity and purpose of the intellect," since it does not allow for student intellectualizing about an issue (1986, p. 119).

3. Neutral impartiality occurs when the teacher does not voice personal views on controversial issues. Controversy is not avoided, as in exclusive neutrality, but the teacher voices arguments or opinions about the topic in the role of "devil's advocate" rather than in the role of teachers with a personal opinion. By offering an opinion, the teacher may predispose students toward that opinion (or against it) and thus shortchange the thinking process about alternative solutions, but

[6]Kelly (1986) described four methods by which the teacher might do this: Selecting the most articulate or esteemed student to represent the preferred position in a debate; deliberately inviting to class a representative of an alternative view whose personality or manner of presentation is likely to offend students or obscure issues; using materials that were intentionally, though not flagrantly, weighted for the desired position; selectively praising responses supporting the preferred position, and ignoring those opposing the position.

by not offering an opinion the teacher deprives students of a model for making a reasoned commitment toward an issue. When the teacher remains silent about an issue, the students miss an opportunity to see a thoughtful presentation about it.

4. Committed impartiality, Kelly's recommended role for teachers, involves teachers in stating rather than concealing their own views on controversial issues. They foster the pursuit of truth by insuring that competing perspectives receive a fair hearing through critical discourse. The teacher must present his/her bias clearly, without trying to convince students to adopt it or to believe it is superior to the other perspectives, and then allow the students to understand and challenge that perspective.

Summary of Guidelines for Classroom Discussion

The ten sets of guidelines for classroom discussion specified student and teacher roles during discussion, suggested how to structure class discussions, and identified characteristics of classroom discussion. These are powerful tools for those wishing to use discussion in the classroom. Clearly, discussion is a structured method of instruction that requires the teachers and students to interact.

Behaviors and participation during discussion typically follow particular rules, depending on the purpose of the discussion. In general, discussants each have a responsibility to consider others' perspectives and share a commitment to exploring an issue or topic together. Teachers facilitate discussions by questioning, prompting, and modeling proper behavior. Students ideally become more self-reliant and less dependent on the teacher for cues about appropriate behavior during classroom discussions. Each of the guidelines presented in this section imputed a significant role to the teacher during successful discussions. The topic, initial structure, and learning outcomes were predicated on the choices and decisions made by the teacher.

The guidelines I reviewed provide direction about teaching with discussion. They help explicate how to use classroom discussion. Underlying the guidelines for discussion is an assumption that teachers' conceptions coincide with the scholars providing the guidance. While suggesting specific student and teacher roles during classroom discussion and listing characteristics of discussion occurs throughout the discussion literature, the authors consistently miss one fundamental element: teachers' conceptions of discussion. Without this knowledge, important questions about discussion remain. For example, are the recommended roles of teachers and students possible, or even

desirable in a high school social studies class? Why might a teacher choose discussion over other methods of instruction? Do subject matter, class "personality," or other variables influence the role of the teacher? My study addresses these questions.

Empirical Research on Teaching with Discussion

In this section I review four empirical research studies that explore teachers and discussion. Findings from these studies do not provide guidelines for using discussion in the classroom, but they provide some insight into teachers' thinking about discussion, and they suggest methods for examining teachers' conceptions of discussion. The studies I review here examine characteristics of classroom discussions (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990), roles of classroom discussion to improve political attitudes and reading comprehension (Hahn & Avery, 1985), and procedures of discussion to explore literature (Marshall, Klages, and Fehlman, 1990, 1991). I give an overview of each study's research question(s), method, findings, and relevance to the dissertation.

Classroom Discussion of Content-Area Reading Assignments

Alvermann, O'Brien, and Dillon (1990) attempted to characterize "middle school discussions of assigned readings from a variety of content area materials" (p. 299). They

observed 24 middle school teachers as they led discussions after class reading assignments.[7] These observations were the primary source of data. The teachers were also asked to define "good" discussions, and their definitions were then used "to help determine the teacher's purpose and aid in interpretation of the (observations)" (p. 396). Data were analyzed using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Findings from the study revealed that discussions in middle school classrooms ranged on a continuum, from lecture to recitation to "open forums." "Open forum" discussions were defined by Alvermann, O'Brien, and Dillon (1990) as discussions in which students freely interjected opinions, elaborated comments and raised their own questions to other discussants. The authors rarely observed open forums, though teachers often reported using them. For example, the majority (17 out of 24) of the classroom interactions labeled by the teachers as open forums were labeled by the authors as either lectures or recitations. Only seven of the 24 teachers engaged in open-forum discussions that matched Alvermann et al.'s definition, a finding which is in accord with research suggesting that teachers overestimate the amount of student participation and the amount of student/teacher interaction during classroom discussion.

[7]The 24 observations took place in the following subject areas: social studies (6), language arts (9), science (6), health (2), special education (1).

A second finding was that teachers' objectives for a lesson influenced the type of classroom discussion during the lesson. For example, lectures occurred when the purpose was to define terms or fill in missing information; recitations prevailed when the primary purpose of a lesson was to "review the content of a reading assignment in preparation for a quiz or test" (p. 319); and open forum discussions occurred when the purpose of the lesson was to "facilitate comprehension" (p. 319).

A third finding of this study was that two factors negatively influenced teachers' plans for using open forum discussion: a fear of losing control of student behavior, and perceived pressure to cover a specific quantity of information in a specific amount of time. Teachers believed that open forums benefitted their students' learning, and if possible they wanted to engage their students in them. However, they often considered open-forum discussions to be an impractical method of instruction for most middle-school students. Teachers believed they had less classroom control during open forum discussions, and were less able to present a specific quantity of information to their students. These two influences led teachers to view recitation and lecture as more practical approaches to teaching.

Alvermann et al.'s (1990) study was relevant to my dissertation for three reasons. First, it demonstrated how Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method is a

useful method for examining discussion. The study provided an excellent example of using qualitative research methods that were oriented toward discovery and exploration, and to generating a theory that was grounded in the data. Second, Alvermann et al. (1990) explored teachers' thinking about discussion and revealed that their thinking was varied. Teachers described discussion as a method of instruction that was both teacher-dominated and a method where students were actively involved in verbally interacting with one another. Finally, Alvermann et al. (1990) began to identify possible factors influencing teachers' use of discussion (e.g., control of students and coverage of subject matter). Like most of the other research on discussion, however, data for their study was primarily collected from observations of classroom discussions. They used teacher interviews, but only to clarify the observations. The unit of analysis, thus, was the classroom, not the teacher. Also, their study examined discussion as a method of instruction only when it followed a reading assignment. Discussion serves other purposes than this.

The next study also revealed factors influencing teachers' use of classroom discussions, and identified one way that teacher conceptions might affect discussions.

Value-analysis Discussions, Political Attitudes and Reading Comprehension

Hahn and Avery (1985) hypothesized that classroom discussions of controversial issues could improve eleventh-graders' reading comprehension and improve their interest in politics. In their study, they used an approach for examining controversial issues called "value-analysis," which uses "higher-level questions, class discussions, and controversial issues...[and] requires students to investigate alternative sides of issues" (p. 49). This approach used classroom discussion to identify the controversial problem or issue, identify competing solutions or positions, and hypothesize about the consequences of the alternatives.

Hahn and Avery used a pre-test/post-test design to measure changes in students' political attitudes and reading comprehension. Their sample was 14 intact United States history classes from a metropolitan county school district. Schools in the district represented a population with diverse socio-economic levels. The classes were randomly assigned to one of three groups: 1) value-analysis groups; 2) reading-only groups; 3) control groups. Over a 10-week period, each group received different amounts of intervention from the researchers. I will briefly describe each group, because it will make the findings clearer.

Once a week, students in Group One read about controversial issues from editorials in major United States

newspapers. These students then participated in a structured value-analysis discussion about one editorial position each week. Prior to the beginning of the study, teachers in Group One attended a half-day seminar to learn how to lead discussions during value-analysis lessons.

Students in Group Two read the same editorials as the students in Group One, but they did not follow their reading with any structured discussion or review. If discussion did occur, it was student-initiated, as opposed to the teacher-structured approach of Group One. Students in Group Three were not assigned the editorials and did not engage in any regular current-events discussions.

Hahn and Avery's (1985) conclusions were tentative. While statistically significant, actual differences between the three groups were minimal. Discussion was linked to an improvement in students' beliefs that they were connected to their social environment. In other words, the students in Group One felt more socially integrated, as opposed to socially alienated, than the students in the other two groups. Discussion also improved students' political confidence and political interest. Value-analysis discussions did not improve students' reading comprehension.

To explain why their results did not support their hypotheses more convincingly, Hahn and Avery cited two factors. First, teachers have difficulty leading discussions. "While a primary strength of our study was the

involvement of classroom teachers, this factor may have (negatively) affected the results. Two teachers in the value-analysis group experienced some difficulty with the technique" (p. 56). Second, the varying socio-economic levels of the students in the schools confounded their findings. Students in higher socio-economic areas scored highest on reading comprehension, while students in low socio-economic areas scored lowest on reading comprehension. Though randomly assigned to one of the three groups, all of the classes in the control group were located in high socio-economic areas. As a result of these two factors, the authors concluded that it was difficult to determine whether differences between groups were primarily attributable to the use of value-analysis in the classes, differences in student abilities, or differences in the students' home and peer environment.

This study was relevant to the dissertation for two reasons: it suggested that teachers' conceptions of discussion affect their classroom actions; and it revealed the importance of knowing which factors influence classroom discussion. Hahn and Avery wanted all of the teachers in their experimental group to use the same discussion techniques and to have the same conception of discussion; two teachers did not. Classroom discussions were conducted differently by these two teachers than by the others. Did those teachers who had difficulty using discussion have a

different conception than the researchers? What created the difficulty of leading a discussion in the way they were taught during a training seminar? These questions need to be addressed. Hahn and Avery raised a question at the end of their study about factors influencing discussion: Does student ability or socioeconomic levels of the student influence teachers' plans for discussion? Hahn and Avery predicted that these factors could influence student learning. Do they also influence teachers when they plan a discussion? While their study did not intend to answer these questions, their findings raised the issue that teacher conceptions and student differences are important factors of classroom discussions.

The next two studies I reviewed examined discussions in literature classes. They concentrate on teachers' perspectives.

Classroom Discussions in Literature Classes

Marshall, Klages, and Fehlman (1990, 1991) examined classroom discussions of literature in high school English classes. The primary purpose of both studies was to examine teacher and student perspectives on the goals and difficulties of discussions about literature; and to describe the basic patterns of classroom discussion about literature. The research also sought to determine whether low-track literature classes engaged in discussions that had different

characteristics from regular literature classes.

Five high school English classes with "average" students (Marshal et al., 1991), and five high school English classes with "lower-track" students (Marshal et al., 1990) were observed. Average students were described as being "neither distinctly talented nor...especially in need of remedial help" (1991, p. 1). Lower-track students were placed in special classrooms that provided lower teacher-student ratios, went over material at a slower pace, and provided some remedial instruction. In both studies, observations took place during class discussions of novels (each classroom did not discuss the same novel). Each teacher, and one to four students from each classroom, were interviewed about the discussions the researchers observed. They were asked two interview questions: 1) what were the goals of classroom discussion?; and 2) what problems typically affected the achievement of those goals? The teacher interviews were particularly relevant to my study since they dealt indirectly with teacher conceptions.

Findings from both studies were similar. Teachers dominated classroom discussions, talking more often and for longer periods than students. The teacher spoke after almost every student "turn." When the teachers talked, they informed students, questioned students, and responded to student questions. When students contributed to the discussions, it was usually in relation to a question or

statement made by the teachers. The teachers in both studies directed the discussions toward the interpretation of the literature text. Through a combination of questions and responses that summarized the contributions of students, the teachers seemed to shape and direct the discussions to accomplish their instructional agenda.

Goals of classroom discussions for teachers of both "lower-track" and "middle-track" literature classes were aimed at "engag[ing students] with the literature on a personal level, [getting them] to think more deeply about it, and to construct a meaning that made sense to them" (1990, p. 7). The teachers wanted to organize classroom discussions that would connect the text to their students' personal lives, but they were frustrated that their students often were not prepared for or engaged in the discussions. The teachers of lower-track students attributed this lack of engagement to the idea that their students were "seldom eager to learn" (1990, p. 37). Similarly, the teachers of middle-track students said the lack of engagement and initiative was attributable to the idea that "students populating middle-track classrooms were either uninterested or unable to participate very fully in (any type of) discussion" (p. 35). None of the teachers saw their insistent control of the discussion as a possible reason for the lack of student initiative and engagement. The authors concluded that the teachers' goals of discussion were often not met because of

the teachers' domination of the discussions, yet teachers believed they must dominate the discussions because their students did not have the ability or interest to engage in discussions of the literature.

The Marshal et al. (1990, 1991) studies are relevant to my dissertation for two reasons: they revealed influences on teachers' uses of discussion, and they suggested a need to explore teachers' conceptions of discussion. Let me explain each reason.

First, Marshal et al. (1990, 1991) revealed that teachers were greatly influenced by their students, and based their decisions about using discussion on a perception of their students' ability to understand works of literature. When the teachers thought a discussion was failing, they quickly "took control," believing their students were incapable of participating in the discussion. Interestingly, this perception crossed student-ability groups. Teachers attributed failed discussions in both average and low-track classes to low student ability and low student interest. In other words, teachers believed that students lacked the ability to participate in a discussion, and lacked interest in the content being discussed.

These studies, however, did not explore other possible influences on teachers' use of discussion. They did not, for example, consider whether the topic of discussion (in this case, a novel) influenced the verbal interactions taking

place in the classroom. Did some works of literature pique student interest while others did not? Is student interest related to content, or are students simply not interested in discussion as a method of instruction? How did teachers' beliefs about students' ability affect classroom discussion? How did teachers determine that students could not discuss, and what criteria did they use to judge the success of a discussion?

The second reason these studies were relevant to my dissertation was that they showed the importance of identifying teachers' conceptions of discussion. For example, Marshal et al. (1990) reported that one teacher led a discussion that she deemed "unsuccessful." The next day she set out to remedy her mistakes of the previous day by being more "in control" (1990, p. 10). However, data was not provided that explained how the teacher was more in control, or even the difference in the teacher's mind of what it means to be in, or not in, control of a discussion. This teacher appeared to have two conceptions of discussion (based on the level of control she exerted on her students), but neither was examined in this study.

Summary of Empirical Research

The empirical studies on discussion that I reviewed provided insight into teachers' definitions of discussion (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990), descriptions of the

difficulties teachers may have using discussion (Hahn & Avery, 1985), the purposes for discussion when teaching literature (Marshall, Klages, & Fehlman, 1990, 1991), and the possible influences that act on teachers' uses of discussion (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990; Hahn & Avery, 1985; Marshall, Klages, & Fehlman, 1990, 1991).

The studies also allude to the idea that teachers may use discussion in more than one way, and for multiple purposes. The decision whether and how to use discussion may be influenced by such factors as course content, teacher personality, students, school setting, or other variables present at school. The intention of this dissertation is to explore teacher thinking about discussion and extend these research findings.

Group Discussion Leadership

Historically, scholars in the field of speech communication have an ongoing interest in how small-group discussions are led. Many of the initial recommendations about discussion, and about leading discussion, emerged from research in this field. A review of relevant literature on discussion is incomplete if this perspective is not included. Of particular relevance to my study are the functions and characteristics of a discussion leader, because I am examining the conceptions held by classroom discussion leaders (teachers).

In this section I will first describe the purpose of discussion as it is viewed in the field of speech communication. I then explore two predominating styles that leaders of discussion adhere to. I follow this with a description of factors leaders should consider when planning to lead a discussion. After that I examine the qualities and functions of a discussion leader. I conclude the section by suggesting the implications for my study of speech communication research.

Discussion in Speech Communication

The field of speech communication views discussion as one approach toward completing a task. Groups are oriented toward tasks such as developing a policy, solving a problem, or suggesting topics for future discussions. Historically, this task-orientation encouraged leaders of the discussion to direct their group toward a consensus. As Ehninger (1943) stated: "Any worthwhile group discussion is in essence a process of controlled group thinking which attempts to arrive at sound judgement concerning a problem situation" (p.163). The leader provided the control.

Research on discussion groups has shifted from this emphasis on consensus, and focused more on the quality of the decision (Barnlund & Haiman, 1960; G. Philipsen, personal communication, June 27, 1995; Scheidel & Crowell, 1979). This has led to the exploration of group dynamics, and group

leadership, in an attempt to insure quality decisions. Training in listening skills, learning how to give and take criticism, using evidence (rather than only opinions) to support comments, and learning how to compromise have forged a better understanding of group dynamics. The group, when effectively led, engages in discussion to develop high-quality, thoughtful decisions (Barnlund & Haiman, 1960; Sargent & Miller, 1971).

Styles of Discussion Leadership

Discussion leaders use many different approaches when working with a group. They may be highly active in the interactions, or be more passive and provide suggestions and ideas for the group to consider. Broadly speaking, however, two styles define discussion leaders: autocratic and democratic. Most leadership styles are a variation of these two. (Barnlund & Haiman, 1960; Sargent & Miller, 1971). Let me explain each in more detail.

Autocratic Style. This style stems from the belief that people tend to be irrational and self-centered. Leaders adhering to this notion dominate and control the group because they believe "control through rules and regulations is necessary to keep one [discussant] from abusing another" (Barnlund & Haiman, 1960 p. 305). These leaders see themselves as a director of the discussion, and intend to move the group in a specific direction. Autocratic

discussion leaders want to accomplish their agenda, and they manipulate the group so it adheres to their ideas. They are not ultimately interested in hearing from each member.

Democratic style. This style is based on the belief that people are rational and humane. Leaders using it attempt to encourage everyone to express their ideas. They believe discussants will exercise "sound judgement and can be trusted...to rise above petty desires and act judiciously in the crises that confront [them]" (Barnlund & Haiman, 1960, p.306). While democratic leaders believe they are equal in status to other members, they also recognize the role of the leader in performing additional duties that will assist the process of discussing and help the group attain its goal.

The value of the discussion process, the importance of critical thinking, and group procedures all will be influenced by the philosophy of the leader. Though leaders will typically possess both leadership styles to some degree, democratic styles are more consistent with the purposes of discussion. They preserve group decisions while respecting the individual input of every member. The remainder of this section, thus, assumes a leadership style more in-line with a democratic approach.

Factors to Consider When Planning a Discussion

One obvious duty of the discussion leader is to plan and organize the discussion. From my review of the speech

communication research, I have identified six general factors that leaders should consider when planning a discussion (Auer & Ewbank, 1954; Barnlund & Haiman, 1960; Gulley, 1960; Scheidel & Crowell, 1979): Analyzing the group, choosing the topic, phrasing the topic for discussion, choosing the form of discussion, arranging the mechanics of the meeting, and determining the purpose of the meeting. Leaders' knowledge and thinking about each factor has a strong influence on the resulting discussion. I will highlight each factor below.

Analyzing the group. The leader must know the general characteristics of the participants and, if applicable, the audience (those who may watch the discussion). If the participants represent different points of view, then the leader should be aware of them to guarantee that all the views are presented during the discussion. Once a topic is selected, advance preparatory information on the topic should be distributed to the participants. Again, analysis of the group members provides the leader with an opportunity to fully inform each member about the topic of discussion.

Choosing the topic. Groups usually do not gather "out of the blue" to discuss a topic. A problem, policy, or some other event likely leads to the discussion. In general, topics are selected because they are of interest to the discussants, or because the discussants have an interesting contribution to make about the topic. Occasionally groups

may be formed to discuss a preplanned series of topics.[8] When choosing the topic, discussion leaders should be aware of the group's interests.

Phrasing the topic for discussion. "Topics should be phrased in such a way that is compelling, attracts attention, and invites discussion" (Auer & Ewbank, 1954, p.32). A question, rather than a statement, attracts more attention and seems less biased. For example, the question: "What is Seattle's responsibility to the homeless?" is usually better than the statement "City policies should care for homeless individuals." The phrasing of the topic should be concise and narrow (e.g., the question above asks specifically about the homeless in Seattle and what to do about their existence), and rouse interest in the participants.

[8]Though not a product of the speech communication field, the National Issues Forum (Melville, 1994) is an example of discussing a pre-planned series of topics. It incorporates many of the principles suggested for group discussions and discussion group leadership. This model follows a study-circle format in that it brings community members together in groups for non-partisan discussions. Each year the National Issue Forum chooses three new issues for discussion, and removes three "old" issues from its list of publications. In this way, an archive of about fifteen current issues are maintained. They then prepare a booklet for each new issue. Facilitators of these community-based discussions, and the participants themselves, use these issue-books as a framework for the ensuing discussions. The books address an issue (e.g., daycare, abortion), provide a clear explanation of the problem or dilemma underlying the issue, and objectively present three or four possible policy choices for the issue. In the forums, participants discuss and analyze the choices. The intent is, through discussion-group interactions, to develop public policy on the issue. The National Issues Forum calls this "choicework," implying that participants discuss different choices in the process of finding common ground on a policy recommendation.

Choosing the format of the discussion. Debates, symposiums, public hearings, committee meetings, panel forums and informal group discussions are each possible discussion formats. The purpose of the meeting, size of the group, available time, number of discussions/meetings, and knowledge level of the discussants help determine the format.

Arranging the mechanical details. The leader must be aware of "background" details that will assist the discussion. Time and location of meetings, length of meetings, the physical arrangement of the meeting place, and the means of informing the participants of times, dates and topics--have an effect on the discussion that will occur.

Determining the purpose. The leader needs to determine what the discussion should accomplish. This helps to determine when the discussion will end, why the discussion is needed, and what product will result from it.

Functions of the Discussion Leader

There is much agreement in the literature on the function of leaders. They affect the morale and performance of a group by their ability to promote participation (Stogdill, 1947). The leader is the person in a group who is responsible for coordinating the activities of the group around the discussion topic. As I mentioned earlier, the autocratic/democratic style of leaders is a strong determinant of their function. Leaders must initiate the

interactions, keep the discussion focused on the topic, and summarize discussants' comments. Leaders need to think at the micro level (what each discussant is doing) and at the macro level (where the discussion is heading). Scheidel & Crowell (1979) call this "inner work" and "outer work." During inner work, leaders observe who is participating and note the interaction patterns of the group. For example, do participants have enough information, are some people dominating the interactions, are "quiet ones" (p.91) being squelched? Once alerted by their observations, leaders must quickly analyze the impact (if any) on the discussion and decide what action should be taken. The action is outer work. Leaders may refocus the discussion by summarizing comments and suggesting a new direction. They might try to build a climate that encourages and allows all discussants to talk. The challenge is to do this without unduly dominating the interactions.

Qualities of Discussion Leaders

A discussion leader needs strategies for encouraging discussants to express their ideas and also consider alternative perspectives. Ideally, these strategies will allow the leaders to be in the background, rather than be in the middle of all the verbal interactions. Philipsen (G. Philipsen, personal communication, June 27, 1995) called this approach "facilitation," because the discussants are assisted

in accomplishing an end goal, rather than led to an end point. Effective facilitation requires skill at speaking and listening, the ability to be impartial, an underlying respect for all discussants, and the ability to think quickly (Barnlund & Haiman, 1979; Larson, 1971). During discussions, facilitators should do the following (G. Philipsen, personal communication, June 27, 1995): pose questions that provide opportunities for discussants to share their knowledge; allow interactions among discussants to occur without intervening too often (controlling the discussion is not the goal); paraphrase, or encourage a "restatement" by a discussant, in an attempt to promote deeper thinking about a comment; and develop a list of characteristics for the discussion (best thought of as a "checklist" of characteristics that leaders hope to observe, such as sharing of more than one perspective, or equal talking by all participants).

Relevance of Discussion Leadership to the Dissertation

Usually, teachers are the leaders of discussions in their classrooms. The views of scholars from the field of speech communication inform this study by raising three questions about teachers' roles during discussion. Do teachers use predominantly autocratic or democratic styles when leading discussion, and why do they think these styles are useful? What do teachers think about when planning discussion, and does their planning coincide with the above

list of factors to consider when planning a discussion? What role do teachers believe they serve during the discussion? These are important yet unanswered questions. More than providing guidelines for classroom uses of discussion, this field of research suggests recommendations specifically for leading discussion outside of the classroom. Classroom discussion might also benefit from these suggestions if the teacher thinks about them in similar ways.

Summary and Research Questions (Revisited)

The literature reviewed in this chapter described research on discussion, and illustrated the limitations of current research on understanding teachers' conceptions of discussion.

The research I reviewed on discussion included summaries of previous literature reviews. None identified characteristics of, purposes for, or influences on classroom discussion from a teacher's perspective. I also reviewed guidelines that described necessary and sufficient conditions for discussion, the role of teacher questioning during discussion, and discussing public and controversial issues. These guidelines provided direction about teaching with discussion, but they each failed to consider teachers' conceptions of discussion.

Four empirical studies on discussion provided insight into teachers' definitions of discussion, the difficulties

teachers might have in using discussion, the reasons teachers use discussion, and some factors that possibly influence how teachers use discussion. Nevertheless, these studies were not designed with teachers' conceptions of discussion as their primary focus.

The field of speech communication provided insight into the discussion-leader role. Research from this field revealed two styles that discussion leaders might use, and described those factors that leaders should consider when planning to lead a discussion.

Given what is known about discussion, the next needed step is to examine the conceptions of teachers. Thus, the five questions of the present study:

1. What are teachers' conceptions of discussions in high school social studies classes?
2. Do teachers have more than one conception of discussion?
3. What characteristics do teachers consider typical of classroom discussions?
4. What purposes do teachers believe classroom discussions serve?
5. What factors seem to influence teachers' use of discussion?

In the next chapter I will describe the methods I used to examine teachers' conceptions of discussion and to answer the research questions.

Chapter Three

Method

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the method by which I collected and analyzed data. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first, "Data Source," describes the participants from whom data was collected, rationales for the sample,and the setting in which the data was gathered. The second section, "Data Collection," describes the collection strategy and procedures. The final section "Data Analysis," explains the analysis strategy of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), and how I used this method to analyze the data.

Data Source

Six teachers participated in this study. Three taught social studies in a suburban high school, and three taught social studies in an urban high school. These teachers were purposively selected (as opposed to randomly selected) to encourage the collection of data from a diverse and theoretically interesting sample (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A description and rationale for the sample I studied follows.

Description of the Sample

Each participant taught one or more of the following high school social studies courses: world history, United States history, current events, American government,

sociology, or psychology. The first two are common social studies courses for tenth and eleventh grade, respectively. The last four are courses typically available to students in the twelfth grade as part of their senior social studies requirement. The teachers were nominated by their building's principal, or their department chair, as teachers who were effective and thoughtful. Also, each teacher claimed to use discussion frequently.[9]

The participants taught at one of two schools: a suburban, primarily caucasian, high school (three teachers); or, an urban (inner-city), racially diverse, high school (three teachers). All of the teachers were caucasians. Teachers at the suburban high school taught either "regular track" or honors classes. Their names are: Alex, Bill, and Cathy[10]. "Alex" is 46 years old and has been a teacher for 22 years. He has both an undergraduate and master's degree in history. He has taught U. S. and world history, as well as advanced placement U.S. history.

"Bill," is 40 years old and a social studies teacher for all his 18 years of teaching. He has an undergraduate and a

[9]This was important because the teachers needed to recall and describe lessons when they used discussion and how they planned for classroom discussion. Since they used discussion frequently, they were able to answer questions such as: what are advantages and disadvantages of discussion, how do teachers believe their students learn with classroom discussions, and why is discussion selected instead of other methods of instruction.

[10]The names of all six teachers are pseudonyms.

master's degree in history. He has taught 11th grade U.S. History and 12th grade current events courses.

"Cathy" is 44 years old and has been the social studies department chair. She has been teaching for 22 years. She has an undergraduate degree in English, with a minor in social science, and a master's degree in secondary education. She has taught U.S. and world history, psychology, and sociology.

Teachers at the urban high school taught either "low track," "regular track," or honors classes. Their names are Deborah, Elaine, and Frank. "Deborah" is 50 years old, and has taught 14 years. She has an undergraduate degree in education with a minor in United States history. She has a special education teaching certificate and a master's in early childhood special education. She has experience as a resource teacher, and has taught U. S. history to students in self-contained, special education classrooms.

"Elaine" is 40 years old and has an undergraduate major in sociology with a minor in history. She has a master's in counseling and a teaching credential in secondary social science. She has taught U. S. history, and sociology.

"Frank" is 55 years old. He has taught for 25 years. He has an undergraduate degree in political science, and a master's degree in educational administration. Frank teaches advanced placement U. S. history courses and honors American government courses, as well as regular-track U. S. history

courses.

Rationale for the Sample

I selected teachers in one subject area in an attempt to focus on subject-specific discussions (social studies discussions), and away from a generic conception of discussion. This was justified by the literature on pedagogical content knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge can be thought of as the combination of knowledge a teacher has about a specific subject and knowledge about how that subject should be taught in a specific context (Grossman, 1990). A link may be made between the research in pedagogical content knowledge and subject-specific discussions. For example, social studies teachers may conceptualize discussion differently than math teachers because of the subject they teach. Teachers' conceptions of the subject matter may influence their conceptions of discussion. As Shulman (1986) contends, a serious fault of research is the inclination to ignore the substance of educational settings such as the "specific curriculum content and the subject matter being studied" (p. 22).

Discussion, with its connection to social interaction and civic participation, is often thought of as a method of instruction benefiting the social studies (Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Gross & Zeleny, 1958). Even with this connection, reports on the use of discussion have shown that it is not a

widely used method of instruction in social studies classes (Cazden, 1988; Goodlad, 1984; Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969; Stodolsky, Ferguson, & Wimpelberg, 1981). Examining social studies teachers' conceptions of discussion, thus, focused the research on a theoretically interesting segment of high school teachers.

Similarities in a sample were helpful for generating initial categories (conceptions of discussion) and properties, and for establishing conditions under which a category exists (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This was my approach when choosing my first sample; the three teachers at the suburban high school. The initial categories were best expanded, refined, and elaborated upon by adding a second sample that was different from the first sample. The teachers at the urban school were chosen for this purpose. They taught students living in a community that was different socio-economically and ethnically from the first sample group. Two sample groups provided data from teachers who worked in diverse communities, and with diverse students. For example, one teacher in this second set of teachers taught special education history. She was selected for the second round of data collection as a result of comments by the first group of teachers. The first group alluded to the idea that the academic ability of students was a factor that influenced classroom discussion. I examined conceptions of "honors" social studies teachers, so it was necessary to also

examine teachers' conceptions from a "basic" or special education point of view.

Maximizing differences among the sample was important because it forced the emerging categories to account for larger differences in the data, and be more encompassing. Following the selection procedures of theoretical sampling, these two samples were my attempt to collect data that differed "widely and diversely" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 63). Since I intended to generate categories that encompassed differences among my sample of teachers, I did not describe how the differences of each teacher led to different conceptions of discussion when I presented my findings. Instead, the emerging categories incorporated the conceptions held by my diverse sample of teachers. Thus, differences in my sample were a predominant concern during sample selection, but were not an emphasis in the presentation of findings.

Rationales for the Selection of the Two Sample Groups

In this section I justify my decision to select teachers from two diverse schools. I suggest that two factors influence teachers' curricular and instructional practices: student differences and characteristics of the community in which a school is located (e.g., socioeconomic status, ethnicity, cultural traditions, etc.). Let me explain each.

Student differences. An exploration of teachers'

methods of instruction (Talbert and McLaughlin, 1993; Talbert, McLaughlin & Rowan, 1993), revealed that teachers determined goals and selected activities for their classes according to their students' prior academic achievement and motivation. Instructional and curricular decisions were influenced by the context of the classroom, and the ability level of the students:

> (teachers) adopt different and seemingly incompatible teaching goals, strategies, and techniques over the course of the teaching day or week. Reasons (for these differences) might include...beliefs that they are adopting to different student achievement levels, or that different class periods have different dynamics" (Talbert, McLaughlin & Rowan, 1993, p. 49).

Curriculum and instruction are often different when students are separated by ability (Oakes, 1985). When "special education" or "low-track" courses are taught, as opposed to "regular-track" courses, teachers change their instructional strategies. Metz (1978) observed that teachers of low-track students simplify and slow their pace of instruction to maintain classroom order and because they believe that low-track students' prefer undemanding and private work. For both of these reasons the teacher adjusts instruction according to student ability. Across subject areas, instruction in low track classes tend to emphasize rote memorization and highly structured assignments. In

"regular" track, and especially in higher track classes, more emphasis is placed on complex tasks that require analytic thinking (Oakes, 1985; Hargreaves, 1987; Gamoran, 1986, 1987). Thus, instructional techniques of teachers and the expected outcomes of the curriculum seem to be influenced by student attitudes and abilities. In relation to classroom discussion, an initial study of teachers' conceptions of discussion hypothesized that teachers hesitated to lead classroom discussions when they believed their students were immature (referring to a lack of social skill), too argumentative, or lacked the ability to discuss (Larson & Parker, in press).

Community differences. The community surrounding a school also influences course content and methods of instruction (Goodlad, 1984; Kozol, 1992). When examining the "effective school model," for example, Witte and Walsh (1990) determined that two very different educational worlds exist, "one in the city and one in the suburb" (p. 192). This supports Porkey and Rutter's (1987) claim that teachers in urban schools "encounter a less positive educational environment, and teaching is a more difficult task" in urban than in suburban schools (p. 388). Furthermore, Anyon's (1980, 1981) examination of fifth grade classrooms in schools serving different "occupational strata" (e.g., working-class, middle-class, affluent professional, and executive elite schools) revealed differences in parents' and teachers'

expectations for the school curriculum and instructional strategies.[11] Socio-cultural expectations of parents and teachers influenced course content and strategies of teaching (Anyon, 1980, 1981; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993).

In sum, teachers' individual conceptions are likely influenced by their particular educational context or setting. Ability grouping of students and the socio-cultural setting of the school especially affect teachers. These influences extend to the instructional strategies selected by the teacher and to curricular decisions. The two groups of teachers in this sample taught a diverse range of students in diverse settings and teaching environments. They were purposively selected to examine conceptions of discussion from teachers in schools that were different in student ethnicities, student ability levels, and community economic levels.

[11]In working-class communities, for example, she found social studies consisted of "largely mechanical, rote work...with little explanation or connection to larger contexts" (Anyon, 1980, p. 75). In middle-class communities, students answered teacher questions about what they had read in the book. The questions helped the teacher determine whether the students understood the material. Occasionally teachers' questions asked students to infer answers from the text. In the executive elite school, students read and discussed the concepts underlying particular issues or events. Students were discouraged from memorizing and were encouraged to reason with the material and "think through their answers" (Anyon, 1980, p. 80).

Data Collection

I conducted two in-depth interviews with each teacher[12]. In the first, the teacher responded to interview questions. In the second, the teacher participated in two think-aloud activities. In this section, I will describe the collection procedures during each interview. Before that, however, I will address a concern about teachers' self-reports on their thinking.

Teachers' Verbal Self-Reports on Their Thinking

The dissertation depended on teachers' self-reports about their use of discussion. As a result, a primary methodological problem was how to elicit and analyze data that were valid and reliable. The use of verbal self-reports for data has been criticized (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). These criticisms stem from the suggestion that people are unaware of what directs their thinking. They lack the ability of "introspection" about their ideas and beliefs (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977, p. 231). While problems are inherent with verbal self-reports, data gathered from them are needed to begin understanding teachers' conceptions of discussion. Researchers have demonstrated that verbal self-reports can provide valid and reliable data when effort is made to adhere to particular methods of inquiry (Claderhead, 1981; Ericcson

[12]Appendix A shows how each research question was addressed. A matrix is presented that shows data collection procedures X research questions.

& Simon, 1980; Peterson & Clark, 1978; Shavelson, Webb & Burstein, 1986). These methods include: Having participants think out-loud while engaged in a task; providing a stimulus that causes participants to recall and report on previous thoughts or ideas; and asking participants to make judgements or decisions about printed materials (Peterson & Clark, 1978; Shavelson, Webb & Burstein, 1986). In this study, I used variations of these methods. In the subsequent descriptions of the data collection techniques I used, I report the steps I took to increase confidence about using verbal self-reports.

Interview One[13]

The first interview consisted of four primary questions. Each question was followed up with probes to clarify the teachers' responses. The first question asked the teachers directly about their notion of discussion, or what they envisioned discussion to be. I asked for specific illustrations, or images, of discussions, either experienced or observed, that exemplified characteristics important to discussions. This question was derived from Taba's (1966) work on concept formation. Taba defined a concept as a mental image that has critical attributes and characteristics. Asking teachers for illustrations or mental images of discussion required them to tap into their

[13]Interview protocols are given in Appendix B

conceptions of discussions. This notion of images was also used in a study of teachers' "practical knowledge" (Elbaz, 1983). Elbaz's (1983) study suggested that teachers have images of their teaching processes: "The teacher's feelings, values, needs and beliefs combine as she forms images of how teaching should be, and marshals experience, theoretical knowledge, and school folklore to give substance to these images" (Elbaz, 1983, p. 134). These images orient teachers' overall conduct, intercede between thoughts and action, and guide teachers' decisions. Teachers' images of classroom discussion likely affect their use of, and their purposes for discussion.

The second question asked the teacher to describe an ideal discussion. Descriptions of ideal discussions attempted to reveal characteristics and expectations the teacher had about discussions in their classroom. Having teachers focus on a specific event (an ideal discussion) revealed what they think happens during classroom discussion. This prompt was based on the assumption that while teachers might not be able to directly state their underlying expectations of discussion (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986), their descriptions of discussion would offer insight about teacher expectations, influences acting in the classroom, and teacher and student roles during discussions. To further examine their thinking, I also asked for descriptions of failed discussions. As with the ideal discussion, failed

discussions illuminated defining characteristics a teacher has of classroom discussion, because failed discussions lack some or all of these characteristics.

In response to the third question, the teacher created a list of possible classroom activities that use discussion. After writing a list, the teacher explained why each activity was labeled as a "discussion activity." This provided more descriptions of discussions' characteristics in different contexts.

The fourth interview question asked the teacher to list the educational purposes, or rationales for using discussion in the classroom (e.g., "Why would you use discussion in the classroom?"). After completing the list, the teacher gave specific examples of discussions for each purpose.

The second, third, and fourth prompts were variations of the stimulated recall method originated by Bloom (1954)[14]. For my study, teachers would ideally observe a video- or audio-tape of their classroom discussions, then recall and report their thought processes during that segment. This would allow them to report their thinking during a specific discussion. However, I did not have access to recordings of these teachers during ideal and failed discussions. For prompt 2, I requested the teacher to first recall and

[14]Stimulated recall is a two-step process. During the first step, subjects watch themself on a video- or audio-tape recording during a teaching episode (stimulus). During the second step, subjects recount their thoughts or decisions during the teaching episode (recall).

describe particular discussions to me (first a successful discussion, then a failed discussion). With a specific discussion in mind, I then asked the teacher to explain why the discussion succeeded or failed.

During the third and fourth prompts, I first requested the teacher to list classroom activities that incorporated discussion (prompt 3) and educational purposes of discussion (prompt 4). These lists served as a stimulus for the teacher to recall details of particular discussions. When teachers returned to each list and gave examples for each item on the list, they were required to recall specific discussions and their characteristics. I requested that they think about their most recent discussion, since self-report data is more valid when it relies on short-term memory of an event (Ericcson & Simon, 1980).

In addition, the third and fourth prompts were developed from the Public Issues Series (Social Science Educational Consortium, 1989). This series produces unit plans that encourage students to take and defend positions on public issues during classroom discussions. The series asks students to answer two questions before engaging discussions: 1) What are the purposes of discussion; 2) What are descriptors of a good discussion. These questions are designed to increase students' awareness of those characteristics that will help the verbal interactions during the class. These same prompts/questions were used to

encourage teachers to consider their use of, and thoughts about, classroom discussions.

Interview Two: Think-aloud Activities

The think-aloud activities were additional approaches for accessing these teachers' conceptions of classroom discussions, and increasing validity and reliability of verbal self-reports. The first activity was a sorting exercise. The second activity asked the teacher to depict the patterns of interactions during a discussion. In both activities, the teacher "talked through" what they were thinking. In other words, they thought out-loud as they completed the tasks. I encouraged them to talk freely, without interruption. However, when they did not explain why they acted in a particular way, or made a particular decision, I prompted them for an explanation.

During the sorting exercise (the first activity) I provided five vignettes of teachers using discussion. The teachers ordered the vignettes from "most" like an ideal discussion to "least" like an ideal discussion.[15] The process of ordering the vignettes forced an evaluation of the discussions, and provided me with descriptions of their evaluations and insight into their views of discussion as

[15]The five vignettes are given in Appendix C, along with a description of how they were developed.

instruction[16]. Teachers were encouraged to combine portions of different vignettes to produce a more accurate description of their ideal discussion. They were not limited to selecting a vignette only as a complete unit.

A strategy used to reveal prototypes of categories (Anderson, 1980; Rosch, 1973) directed this activity. The term "prototype" (Anderson, 1980; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995) is commonly used in reference to a person's conceptions of a typical category member. The following statement serves as a useful example:

> As we all know, both robins and chickens are birds. Taxonomically, robins and chickens are equally good birds. However, most people have definite opinions about what birds are like, and they would generally agree that robins are more consistent with these opinions than chickens. People have strong conceptions about what a "good" or typical member of a category is for most categories (Anderson, 1980, p. 129).

Anderson explored prototypes by showing people pictures of different members of a category (e.g., pictures of different

[16]This is a variation of a method of inquiry called "policy capturing" (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Shavelson, Webb & Burstein, 1986). During this method, participants are asked to make judgements and decisions about pre-written materials (e.g., vignettes). This method relies very little on teachers' self-reports, and was included as an additional way to access information about teachers' conceptions of classroom discussion.

types of birds). By rank ordering the pictures, he could identify what characteristics made some pictures more prototypical.

By thinking of discussion as a category, I assumed that teachers had conceptions of a typical discussion. Where the robin was a prototype bird because it had the most "birdlike" characteristics, teachers' descriptions of prototype discussions revealed what they believed characterized classroom discussions.

During the second think-aloud activity the teachers drew on a class seating chart the interaction patterns they thought would occur during a discussion similar to the one in their highest-ordered vignette. These lines depicted the verbal interactions between teacher and student, student and teacher, and student and student. Drawing the patterns of interactions, while explaining them to me, served as a heuristic for making explicit the thought processes and images of interactions teachers believed occur during discussions (Shavelson, Webb, Burstein, 1986). This activity immediately followed the ordering of vignettes so the teacher could refer to a specific, recent, contextualized discussion (Ericcson & Simon, 1980).

Data Analysis

The purpose of the analysis was to generate hypotheses about the conceptions of discussion held by teachers, and to

describe possible factors that influenced the use of these conceptions.

Four Stages of the Constant Comparative Method

My data analysis closely followed the four stage process of the constant comparison method of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All interviews and think-aloud tasks were audio-taped and transcribed. The analysis was designed to induce teachers' conceptions of discussion. As such, it was an iterative process requiring repeated comparison of the data.

The analysis of data consisted of the following four stages. First, I generated categories by examining collected data, attempting to identify common themes in the data. This was the constructive phase of data analysis where I read the transcriptions and created initial categories. The second stage involved the integration of categories and their properties. During this stage, I compared similarities and differences among the categories created in stage one. Some categories combined with others that had similar properties. I returned to the data repeatedly while integrating the categories and their properties. By constantly comparing data, I hoped to approach "theoretical saturation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a point where additional data did not create additional categories or properties of the categories. This increased the confidence that the categories were

sufficiently refined and elaborated. The third stage further integrated the data around fewer, more encompassing categories. This broadened the scope of each category, abstracting them from the data. Lower level categories (narrow and less-encompassing) emerged quickly from the data. I started with many diverse categories because they helped describe teachers' conceptions of discussion that were closely tied to the data. Broadening them, as properties were integrated, occurred as more data were compared and connections among the data emerged.

These first three stages did not necessarily follow this linear progression. Typical of this method of analysis, these stages formed a repetitious process of coding, comparing, and refining (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Parker & Gehrke, 1986; Creswell & Brown, 1992). The constant comparison of data led to the fourth stage of data analysis: writing a "theory in-process" of teachers' conceptions of discussion. These conceptions, abstracted from the data, are then available for comparisons with other samples that provided additional sources of data.

In this study, data are presented to illustrate the categories, and reveal how the categories were developed. Segments of field notes, quotes, and explanations of the coding process provide evidence that the categories were well grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Since data collection and data analysis are closely linked in the constant comparison method, my analysis occurred as I collected data. I returned to all the data repeatedly during all phases of analysis. Transcriptions were labeled with the code name of the teacher, and whether it was "interview #1 data" or "think-aloud data." In this way, initial categories were efficiently refined or elaborated with new data during multiple iterations.

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

In this section I outline the data collection and data analysis plan across the two groups to show the order of the interviews with each teacher, at each school. Group One is the suburban high school. Group Two is the urban high school. Three teachers were interviewed at each school. To explain the collection and analysis of data, the teachers at each school are referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C.

I) Collected data from Group One.

   1) Conducted the first interview with Teacher A in Group One. Analyzed data, and generated an initial list of possible conceptions of discussion.

   2) Conducted the first interview with Teacher B in Group One. Analyzed data, comparing it with the categories developed from the analysis of Teacher

A. Revised the conceptions list as needed.

3) Conducted the first interview with Teacher C in Group One. Analyzed and compared the data from this interview with the list of conceptions generated from the comparisons of teachers A and B. At this point, the number of categories expanded quickly. However, data also began to assimilate into existing categories. If data was coded under an existing category, then it was compared with all data coded under that category. As data fit existing categories, properties of the categories emerged (properties of categories are essentially sub-categories, or dimensions and conditions under which a category is pronounced or minimized).

4) Conducted the second interview with Teacher A in Group One. Compared the data from this interview with the list of conceptions. This process of alternating data collection and analysis continued for each think-aloud task of Teacher B and Teacher C.

II) Collected data from Group Two.

1) Conducted the first interview with Teacher A in Group Two. Data analysis followed the procedure for Group One. As data were examined, they were categorized under existing conceptions, or as a

new conception. In either case, they were compared with data already collected. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) state: "the basic, defining rule for the constant comparative method is: while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category" (p. 106).

2) Conducted the first interviews with Teacher B and Teacher C, respectively. Compared data with the current conceptions list.

3) Conducted the second interview with each teacher, and analyzed the data after each interview. At this point, the data analysis became more efficient, because the number of new categories declined as analysis progressed. The number of categories eventually decreased as some combined with other, more encompassing categories. However, new categories were still created when none of the existing categories were pertinent for the new data. After each teacher's interview, data from the interview added categories, refined (sharpened) categories, and/or elaborated (further illustrated) existing categories.

III) Extracted evidence (e.g., examples, quotations, field notes, etc.) from the data to support and clarify the emerging theory.

Analysis Illustration

I conclude the chapter with an illustration of the analysis procedure. I show how one of the conceptions emerged: "discussion as guided transfer of knowledge." This illustration should help the reader follow and evaluate the decisions I made during analysis.

I began the analysis by examining the interview responses of the first teacher, Bill. Two themes emerged quickly, both related to purposes of discussion: Discussion helped motivate students, and discussion helped students link school topics to the non-school world. Based on these themes I created the categories "motivation" and "knowledge generalization." Three responses were categorized under "motivation": discussions helped students gather and present information to classmates; discussions encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning; and discussions provided students with an anticipatory set for an upcoming unit. Three other responses were grouped under "knowledge generalization": Discussions gave students opportunities to understand and explain current events; they encouraged students to theorize about the relationship among two or more current events (e.g., city-wide increases in unemployment and increases in robberies could be connected to economic despair); and they helped students examine possible solutions to community problems.

Next, I compared Cathy's interview responses to the categories developed from Bill's responses. While Cathy's responses did not cause me to revise the first category, "motivation," they did cause me to sharpen the second, "knowledge generalization." Three aspects of knowledge generalization were added to the picture: exploring consequences of historical events (e.g., What are ways the Civil War impacts us now?), connecting school-learned information to societal issues (e.g., Can we take our knowledge about gun control and make a recommendation to the city council?), and group problem solving (e.g., using discussion in cooperative learning activities). Cathy explained that discussion encouraged students to infer from particular details solutions to general issues (e.g., use specific details about the homeless in Seattle to address the general issue of society's responsibility to the homeless). She called this a "process of induction." This label suggested a different way of thinking about how discussions can help students generalize information. I returned to each example previously coded under "knowledge generalization." Each alluded to this notion of moving from particular to general knowledge. Renaming the category "induction" seemed to capture this interpretation.

Two slightly different properties of "induction" emerged in Alex's responses: Discussion encouraged the application of textbook information to current situations, and discussion

promoted comparisons between historical and contemporary events. Alex also explained that discussion encouraged in-depth treatment of information and challenged students to re-examine some of their preconceptions. However, this benefit of using discussion was a slow process that required more class time than lecturing. Since I did not think the existing categories captured these data well, I created a third category called "learning-in-depth" to accommodate them.

The second phase of data collection and analysis, the think-aloud tasks, now began. Bill ordered the five vignettes as follows, from the one that is most like a discussion in his own classroom to the one least like it:

Most	Brian's "bull session"
	Chris's "dialectical discussion"
	Kerry's "problematical discussion"
	Jack's "informational discussion"
Least	Jim's "quiz show"

Bill thought Brian's discussion was most like his own provided that Brian did three things: (a) encouraged learning through discussion, (b) encouraged students to change their minds, and (c) required preparation. I coded this under each category--"motivation," "learning-in-depth," and "induction." Clearly, the properties of these three

categories were entangled. Bill commented that he "moved through" his material more slowly when he used discussion. After a discussion, however, he believed his students had a deeper understanding of the information (i.e., they were able to relate historical occurrences to contemporary events after a discussion). The "learning-in-depth" category appeared to be similar to induction. In depth understanding helped discussions move from specific details to general application. Therefore, I pulled learning-in-depth into induction, reasoning that the former provided illustrations for and added properties to the latter.

Think-aloud data from Cathy contributed examples to the motivation category. Discussions motivated students, she believed, to collect and "induce" ideas from information they collected. For example, when students knew they would be discussing how the North American Free Trade Agreement could be beneficial 20 years from now, they spent many hours researching this topic outside of class. Discussions also motivated students to examine information more thoughtfully. For example, Cathy told me of a discussion about inalienable human rights that made her students want to examine the perspectives of Haitian immigrants in Florida. It became apparent in these statements that she believed discussions motivated students to form and use knowledge inductively. Motivation was not a category distinct from induction, perhaps. Rather, it helped the discussions become more fully

and genuinely inductive. What I initially categorized as motivation now contributed properties to the growing category, induction. I was left with only one, omnibus category.

Alex believed that discussion encouraged students to apply knowledge learned in class to situations and circumstances outside class. I originally categorized this statement under induction. However, his idea that discussion prepared students to apply knowledge prompted me to revise my current category label. I reviewed all of the previous examples under induction, and decided that "application" described this conception more accurately. Moving from the particular to the general (induction) was only one way that discussion encouraged application. The ultimate purpose of discussion in the application category was not merely to move from particular to general, or to motivate students, or to learn about a topic in depth. The purpose driving this conception of discussion was to encourage a way of understanding information that encouraged usage in a variety of configurations and settings.

I next began collection and analysis of the second set of three teachers. Cognizant of the properties of discussion as application, I examined Frank's interview responses. He did not use discussion to encourage students to understand and use information in multiple settings and situations. He did believe discussion helped motivate students to interact

verbally, but motivation for this purpose was not of the same ilk as motivation when students were applying knowledge.[17] I then examined Elaine's interview responses, and compared them with the emerging categories. She mentioned that students "take ownership" of a topic because discussion allowed them to explore and understand it fully. In addition, she commented that students were motivated to learn about a topic outside of the school setting if they had discussed it in class. In short, the interest-level of students was heightened through discussion. Both of these referred to a common purpose: classroom discussion encouraged students to increase their personal interest in a topic. Information explored in the classroom through discussion was likely to be applied in various ways by students when they were outside of the classroom. These comments elaborated the conception of discussion as application. Students needed interest in the topic if they were to explore it further away from the classroom.

A slightly different category emerged from Deborah's interview responses: Discussion clarified student thinking as they tried to "put their thoughts into words." Understanding, through the process of talking, served to motivate students because they detected they were learning. Discussion, it seemed, did not serve only as an extrinsic

[17]This comment of his ultimately served to illustrate a different conception of discussion.

source of motivation whereby students learned because they were motivated to prepare for a discussion. The very process of discussing led students to understand more. Discussion motivated students because they saw it as a tool for gaining insight and understanding about a topic. I noted that one property of application appeared to be related to learning that occurred from the process of discussion as well as from the preparation that preceded discussion.

Responses from the think-aloud task with Elaine (again Frank's responses did not refine or elaborate this category) revealed that discussion was useful for "linking" the community to the classroom. Controversial issues in the community, or world, could be explored in the classroom through discussion, Elaine reasoned. Armed with knowledge from the classroom discussion, students could go into their community with a greater understanding of an issue. While this was an example of "applying" knowledge, her use of the term "link" seemed more encompassing. Students were able to apply school-knowledge only after they linked, or connected, it with their lives. I reviewed the data coded under this category and noted that Bill referred to discussion as a method for "linking" the classroom to the political community. Alex alluded to this when he mentioned that discussions allowed students to "compare" the present with the past.

My existing label, discussion as application, seemed to describe the result of discussions that actually connected the classroom to the community/country/world. Though "link" was used by the teachers, I determined that "transfer of knowledge" characterized the conception as a process of moving knowledge (transferring) gained in a classroom discussion to remote situations and circumstances. I examined each example coded under application and determined that "transfer" was a more descriptive title. This examination also revealed that the teachers guided students during this process. The role of the teacher was inherent to the notion that students transfer knowledge to different circumstances. I renamed this conception: discussion as guided transfer of knowledge.

Finally, I examined Deborah's think-aloud data. She commented that discussion often helped students recognize the pertinence of "textbook facts" to their own lives. This accorded with the existing conception. I was left with a conception of discussion where the teacher guided students and promoted a transfer of school knowledge to different situations that present themselves to the student.

This brief sketch of category generation should help convey the constant-comparative procedure by which this one conception of discussion was constructed. Other conceptions evolved in similar fashion. In all, the interviews with the first set of three teachers left me with eleven categories.

The list grew to sixteen during analyses of their comments during the think-aloud task. These eventually were pulled into five encompassing categories. During the analysis of the second set of three teachers I looked to challenge and expand these categories and add new categories if they emerged from the data. Comparing the new data with the existing categories provided additional properties and examples that first expanded the number of categories and later caused me to collapse them into six conceptions described in the next chapter. Factors influencing teachers' use of conceptions evolved in the same manner as the process just illustrated. Five factors that influence the use of conceptions of discussion emerged from an original list of fourteen. They, too, are described in the next chapter.

Summary of Method Chapter

My purpose in this chapter was to describe the method by which I collected and analyzed data for this study. The chapter had three sections, one on data source, one on data collection, and one on data analysis. The data source section described the setting in which the data was gathered, the participants from whom data was collected, and rationales for the sample. The second section, data collection, described the collection strategy and procedures. The third section, data analysis explained the analysis strategy of the constant comparative method. I also provided an analysis

illustration to describe in detail how one conception emerged. I included this to help the reader follow and evaluate the decisions I made during analysis.

In the next chapter I will present the findings for this study. The chapter has two sections. In the first I present conceptions of discussion that emerged from the collected data. In the second section I present five factors that influenced teachers' uses of different conceptions of discussion. These, too, emerged from the interview and think aloud data.

Chapter Four

Findings/Hypotheses

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings that emerged from the data. Findings are presented in two sections. The first section, titled "Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion," contains six conceptions of discussion that eventually emerged from the data. The second section, titled "Factors Influencing Uses of Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion," contains five factors that influence what conceptions teachers use. According to the canons of the grounded theory approach, the conceptions and the factors influencing the use of conceptions are presented as hypotheses that are grounded in data and tentative, pending additional rounds of data gathering and analysis. As such, they provide an initial layer of understanding of teachers' conceptions of discussion. Because they are hypotheses, I use the present tense and speak generally of "teachers" rather than of "these six teachers."

Each conception of discussion, and each factor influencing the use of these conceptions, is presented along with segments from the interview and think aloud transcripts. I provide a considerable amount of data to illustrate each category, and to reveal how the categories were developed. Segments of field notes and quotations provide evidence that the categories are well grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion

Six conceptions of classroom discussion emerged from the data:

1. Discussion as recitation
2. Discussion as teacher-directed conversation
3. Discussion as open-ended conversation
4. Discussion as posing challenging questions
5. Discussion as a guided transfer of knowledge
6. Discussion as practice at verbal interaction

I provide an explanation and excerpts from the data as support for each conception.[10]

1. Discussion as Recitation

Teacher-dominated classroom talk characterizes discussion as recitation. Interactions between teacher and student typically follow the three-step pattern that is detailed in the recitation literature: 1) teacher initiated statement/question; 2) student response; 3) teacher feedback/evaluation. Teachers emphasize its utilitarian value: When they want to "cover" a large amount of information, assess students' understanding, or review for a test, this type of discussion is preferred. A comment by Cathy is illustrative:

This is not my choice of how discussion is to be

[10]Appendix E provides a matrix showing the conceptions of discussion held by each of the six teachers.

> used, but it does serve a definite educational purpose if I were reviewing for a test, or after a chapter/unit had been covered. It is an effective way to make sure the students...read the textbook and understand the main points... There are definite times for this use of discussion, and it is not a completely invalid method.

These discussions can be used as "oral quizzes," with each answer receiving immediate attention from the teacher. Because teachers can ask students to produce specific answers to questions, recitation becomes a quick, efficient way to evaluate students.

Elaine reported using recitation during discussions she called "quiz shows." Teams of students competed to answer her questions correctly. She described the interaction and purpose in the following way:

> If we are having a quiz show, where half of the class is on one side and half on the other, then I'll read the question and see who can get the answer. I can cover the same thing [privately with] textbook questions that I cover [publicly with] the quiz show discussions, but they have to prepare for them so their team can win.

Similarly, Deborah, believed that discussion "can be a kind of oral testing...[where you are] trying to find out generally what they know about the topic. You stress 'wrong

answer,' 'right answer,' which is necessary sometimes."

When teachers want to control the topic of discussion and transmit specific information, recitation-style discussions are useful. Teachers determine who talks merely by selecting one student over another. Student-to-student interactions rarely occur when teachers ask questions and evaluate student responses. Alex illustrated this:

> Most of it [recitation] is between teacher and student and not so much between student and student. If we get in groups or something like that, that's different, but in a classroom situation, when the question is posed by the teacher, it's student-teacher.

During recitation-style discussions, teachers are able to distribute information to students quickly and efficiently. When teachers are "in a hurry to cover information," they rely on lecture or recitation. In fact, when teachers are not lecturing, this type of discussion is the main way they verbally transmit facts and ideas to students. Through questioning and by providing feedback, teachers are involved in every interaction and are able to transmit particular facts and ideas to students.

2. Discussion as Teacher-Directed Conversation

Another way teachers conceive of discussion is as a conversation that they lead and control. There is more

student-student interaction than in recitation, hence more the feel of a conversation; and the conversation is conducted for a different purpose: Teachers want their students to understand multiple perspectives, or they want to encourage a deeper understanding of the topic being discussed. Still, the conversation is tethered to a teacher-selected question or topic. The teacher actively directs the conversation, but allows students to interact more freely. Bill explained its purpose:

> there are also other kinds of discussions that I try to construct that definitely will get students from point A to point B. There is a light bulb that I want to ultimately turn on, whether it's a piece of knowledge, or whether it's a concept I want them to understand.

One way teachers move the conversation along is by prompting and summarizing student comments. For example, Elaine reported that she often follows student comments with the following sentence stem: "So what you are saying is..." By doing so she attempts to highlight those comments pertinent to the question or topic, and downplay those that are not. Alex recounted directing a discussion by continuously referring his students to an opening question (i.e., "Why should we be responsible for the homeless?"). He explained why he required his students' comments to keep so close to this question:

> It is nice to have opinions, but they have to lead to something. For example, if the discussion is on abortion, and all that is thrown out is a bunch of opinions about abortion, then the result doesn't necessarily lead to any end goal.

By directing the discussion, teachers control their students' behavior and control the content being covered. This technique is not as "controlling" as recitation, however. Students interact more with one another and respond to student-posed questions as well as teacher-posed questions. In addition, the teacher does not provide feedback on every student comment, as is the case during recitations. Still, the teacher's presence is critical to direct the discussion in a predetermined direction. Cathy said she wanted to keep her students' discussions close to the content they were reading: "What I like about using discussion is that...it is tied to the subject matter and content...the talk is about what is in the book." Alex said he directed his students' discussions away from "faulty" or "incorrect" facts that are contributed by students. His example helps describe a role for teachers during these discussions: monitor the discussions for inaccurate or incorrect comments.

> As a teacher you should intervene and correct wrong facts. For example, today someone was mentioning that Hitler was a Jew, and that

> explains why he was so hard on the Jewish people, but it also is a confounding piece of information about why he would do the things he did. Well, if that is not addressed, then the discussion will not serve the purpose of giving information to the students. The teacher needs to have the factual knowledge in mind in order to make sure the information being discussed is accurate and correct.

During teacher-directed conversations teachers insure that everyone has the opportunity to talk. While teachers monitor comments for accuracy during these discussions, students rely on their teachers to maintain order. During these discussions, teachers are actively participating with students as well as correcting and directing them. As Elaine said:

> I don't think I could step away from my class every day and have it [their discussion] be as rich. So that is the real role of the teacher, to guide. [W]hen we begin to discuss [controversial] topics or questions, I suppose that I am the chief facilitator in that a lot of times the students get all caught up in the topic. They know if they raise their hands...I will acknowledge them, so they won't just sit there and worry about never talking. I make sure there is order.

In addition to calling on students who raise their hands, Elaine recalled that she also reminded her students about the purpose of the discussion with prompts such as: "This isn't a debate right now, it is hearing everybody's point of view," and "Let's hear from some of the people who haven't spoken yet."

Deborah suggested that another reason teachers stay involved in the discussion is to be in a better position to manage their students' behavior:

> I don't think there are many topics you can't discuss, but...I like to be sure where discussion will lead...I have seen that even the best group, if given the wrong moment, can turn on somebody. I have seen too much of that and that is what I would fear.

Frank wanted to direct students toward several points of view without "parading" the facts past them during a lecture. His role was critical to the discussion because he encouraged students to talk and react to his comments and ideas:

> Education to me is more than just training or sitting in front and parading a series of facts and viewpoints which are mine. We have not done anything. All we have done is some training. But if they are involved in thinking and...talking and reacting with me, then we are going to wind up, if all goes well, with several points of view, many

points of view, between boys and girls and different ideas.

Frank taught in an inner-city high school. He explained how using discussion "in this part of town" had the potential of exposing students to different points of view:

> I think it is easiest for us in this part of town to see real differences in the traditional facts that are placed in the history texts, or different sides of the issues. I mean we have many points of view represented here, right? And that's the joy of working here in this part of town. Different issues are always here in the classroom, and I have to think of them too. For example, just the way people see the world and people react to different things like who's in power, how you present yourself, and different definitions about the rightness of a society, and appropriate behavior.

Teachers direct discussions in an attempt to expose their students to multiple perspectives on a topic, and to determine how well students understand perspectives other than their own. Some of the perspectives are presented when students share findings from personal reading and research. Multiple perspectives are also shared when students share from a more personal point of view. Cathy reported using such discussions by bringing up topics on which her students

had an array of knowledge. Her goal was not to reach a consensus or draw a conclusion but to "engage" students and draw out their ideas about the topic:

> Well, they are engaged with the topic...participating and bringing alternative ideas to the topic. Most of my topics hardly ever [permit] only one way to look at something.

Cathy thought this kind of discussion helped to give her students the practice they needed, as burgeoning citizens, in understanding one another's viewpoints. Elaine felt similarly:

> I want them [students] to at least look at other sources of information, other points of view, other experiences... [to] see things from a larger point of view...I want them to become critical thinkers, and to realize that they can learn from a lot of different sources, not just...what they agree with or are familiar with.

Elaine followed this statement with an example of a classroom discussion on beginning a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program at her school. Her example suggests that a reason teachers direct discussions is to challenge students' thinking. Teachers prod and question students in an attempt to direct them toward more fact-based opinions.

> Now we are debating this [JROTC] program. Once again, the kids don't all have all the

> information, but that doesn't stop them from having an opinion. So this [discussion] is a good way to get at what that program really is...you are getting kids to think critically, asking, "Where's the truth in your comments?" and "Do we need more information?"

Or, as Deborah found, during discussion "I think you hear yourself saying things you didn't know you thought. Talking clarifies your thinking, your thoughts."

Teachers also direct discussions by providing scripts, or roles, for students to assume during the classroom interactions. The roles themselves serve as a constant guide for the interactions. Bill took this approach when he reported engaging his class in an examination of different historical perspectives. He set up "contrived" discussions from particular time periods in American history, and then used role-playing and questions to challenge students' understanding of how decisions were made and what people believed. For example, his students role-played discussions among congressmen in 1789. Students researched a role, assumed that character, then reenacted a congressional hearing. Some students represented people from the present day as well, and entered the discussion by bringing knowledge that was different or unknown in the 1700s. As this diverse group tried to question, negotiate, and converse on a specific topic, students addressed multiple points of view

across multiple eras of history. Elaine also used role-playing, through mock trials and mock editorials,[19] for this purpose. She directed the discussion by placing the students in very specific roles. In turn, these roles served as a constant guide for the interactions during the classroom discussions.

3. Discussion as Open-Ended Conversation

Teachers do not always direct discussions or evaluate student responses. During open-ended discussions, teachers verbally interact with their students as participants. Teacher and students alike make comments and offer opinions. At times open-ended discussions turn into debates and heated arguments. Students often will leave class "mad at each other and mad at me," according to Alex. Bill maintained that open-ended discussions provide students with "tremendous freedom to explore ideas":

> [The teacher] is not telling them [the students] what avenue they have to follow. I mean they may start talking about document "Y" but may end up in what seems to an outsider a completely unrelated area. And I don't have any problem with that. I

[19]Marie used the term "mock editorials" to describe a process where students write and present an editorial article for a specific historical time period or event. For example, students defended the United States' civil war from the perspective of a New York businessman (or of a Southern plantation owner).

> think it helps students understand that their world is interconnected, that mature, intellectual ideas are interconnected.

Open-ended discussions offer students the opportunity to experience a free flow of ideas, and to enjoy this flow. As Elaine said:

> A lot of times they [students] will still be talking about the issue on the way out the door. And I like that because that shows me that the discussion meant something to them. That it matters to them.

By interacting with students, teachers model how to participate in open-ended discussions. Part of what they model is enthusiasm about the topic of discussion and enjoyment of the discussion process itself. According to Bill:

> if I can show students that [an] intellectual exchange of ideas is enjoyable, then I think I've done them a service in terms of building a participatory citizen who's going to be more active in the community. And, I equate activism with human happiness.

Teachers believe that student enthusiasm about discussion leads to more interactions and increased sharing of ideas. Deborah, when describing a "wonderful discussion" on whether or not explorers really "discovered" places around

the world, explained student interactions during one open-ended discussion:

> It wasn't that I didn't nudge them occasionally. But, during the discussion, they fed off of each other. That's what discussion ought to be. It ought to be people who are just bursting with a contribution or a question that leads to something else.

Open-ended discussions also provide students with a safe environment in which to tackle controversial issues in a diverse group. Such interactions are important to teachers because they feel their students need this experience. As Bill said:

> You're building confidence. Most of these people [referring to his students] don't have the confidence right now to stand up in front of the school board meeting or public library committee....I really don't care where the students are in terms of opposing or supporting [a topic] when we're all done with this twenty-minute discussion.... And, it's fun! I mean, dialogue--that kind of an exchange in a nonmalicious environment--in a non-threatening environment--can be fun.

Cathy made roughly the same point:

> They know a lot of things. But they haven't the

> experience. So sometimes we bounce it off each other for the experience. And I really don't see my role as pedagogical. I mean, I really don't think I'm the one to say <u>these</u> are the values, and <u>these</u> are the facts, and <u>these</u> are the rights, and <u>these</u> are the wrongs, and you have to agree. I try to be fairly neutral, and I try to be nonconfrontational. What I also try to present are the alternatives to the whole thing....But it doesn't work unless they are engaged, it doesn't work unless they really want to be here, if they are willing to talk. You hope they have some ideas they are willing to share because it is good preparation.... While there is some value in letting students talk about issues that are pressing on their minds and that they want to talk about, this would be the most valuable if the discussion is tied to the course content.

For Frank, it seemed that interaction during open-ended discussion allowed students to "pool their skills and knowledge and [develop] their ability to present ideas verbally. They are bringing in reading materials and...they are thinking and are willing to talk."

Teachers view open-ended discussions as a close approximation of "adult" conversations--or conversations in which participants can freely share what they know about a

given topic. During them, the teacher does not feel obligated to offer input or guidance. "A lot of times I don't even get to provide my point of view, but that doesn't really matter," said Elaine. "I feel happy that they are 'into it.'" Deborah, emphasizing the need for students to interact with one another, added that the teacher should only "prod occasionally, once the discussion starts."

It is important to note that open-ended conversations center on a particular concept, piece of information, or question. While they may have an open end, they do not have an open beginning. When asked if discussions were open for any topic that the students wanted to talk about, teachers quickly respond that the value of open-ended discussions is the freedom students had to talk about a subject or issue in any <u>way</u> they wanted, not necessarily on any <u>topic</u> they wanted. Teachers carefully select the topic to be discussed. As Frank stated, discussion "is talking about a problem or a situation or a condition that I introduce to the class." A topic must meet two criteria: It must fit into the curriculum, and be one about which the students already know something. Bill's comments illustrates this further:

> These young people can't walk in just cold, [with the teacher] saying "OK, just talk." There's something that is predetermining the topic of discussion. The teacher has to provide the students with some form of a catalyst --a reading,

> a quot[ation], a passage--and they're supposed to read it, consider it, and be super critical of it before they walk into the arena [classroom]. If not, this is not a form of discussion that I would buy into. If it's just a discussion for the sake of discussion, it might be fine for a homeroom class. It would be a nice homeroom class activity, but not necessarily an academic activity.

Cathy described how she started an open-ended discussion in her sociology course:

> We are talking in my sociology classes today about family structure, and let me tell you we had already gone through the formal aspect of it, so today I just put a little outline on the board, and I said "I really want three things out of you today. I want to make sure you know the vocabulary, I want you to take a look at reasons why families change, what are reasons your textbooks suggested that family structures change over time, and third I want to look at myths about families, and what are facts about families. But, I want you to tell me about what you think in addition to that." And we opened up like that. It's open-ended.

Elaine recounted an example of showing a ten-minute clip

from the television show "20/20" to initiate student thinking about gender inequities in the workplace. She followed this with a question "to provide a definite starting spot" for the discussion, then she became a participant with her students.

4. Discussion as Posing Challenging Questions

While teachers frequently combine questioning and discussion, the purpose of this conception of discussion is to challenge students' beliefs and ideas. Discussion as posing challenging questions differs from discussion as recitation because teachers are not seeking particular answers. It differs from teacher-directed conversations because teachers' questions are not intended to guide students or lead them to a certain end point. It differs from open-ended conversations because teachers continue to pose specific questions throughout the discussion; their role is as questioner rather than participant. Five teachers in the sample called this the "Socratic method" of teaching, and each claimed to use it.

Cathy explained her role during this type of discussion as "never give them any answers...The whole business of Socrates was to ask questions and never give you any answers, but pose problems in questions and not draw things to a close." For Elaine, questions "challenge" and "puzzle" students and encourage them to "request information they have not thought about--more details or different perspectives."

Bill reported that he supplemented his questions with reading materials to challenge student thinking. In recalling a classroom discussion he had led several years ago, Bill explained how presenting an unpopular editorial viewpoint challenged students:

> [M]ost students thought that the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] was bad for the United States, that we're going to lose jobs. They couldn't see that there was a possibility that actually more jobs would be created. So, I [gave] them a particular editorial from a particular newspaper that explored this unfamiliar territory.

Teachers often refer to using a "Socratic dialogue" with their students. They involve themselves in a discussion by posing challenging questions to students, and commonly answer student questions with additional questions. Bill, for example, said he often rephrased his students' statements as questions in an attempt to spur a reaction from them:

> I see myself coming in and engaging people in almost a Socratic dialogue...Throw questions, prompt. I do that an awful lot in...large groups especially. I do a lot of role-playing...where I take on a persona, I take on a position that I know will spark a reaction from the audience. And I at times take that to the extreme. It's my

> opportunity in class to be an actor, and basically to elicit dialogue and a reaction from them [with questions]. But not in a chaotic sense. Again, with some structure so that whether it's a reaction of an individual or a small group of people, other folks are in the background listening to that...and then having an equal opportunity to react. I see my role at times in helping them paraphrase one another's reactions [by asking repeated questions].

Teachers seem willing to pose provoking questions as long as they encourage deeper thought about the topic being discussed. Bill's reference to challenging students for the purpose of "spark(ing) a reaction" in the above quotation provided a good example of this approach. In this conception, questions direct students' thinking about a topic, but their answers are not the end goal. The real goal is to encourage the process of thinking about a topic, through questioning.

A fine line exists between inciting student responses and maintaining a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning. For example, Frank explained that he used challenging questions to present a less-dominant perspective. He told of a current events discussion where students were only providing a "Democrat's argument," so he questioned their comments from a "Republican's perspective." He

explained:

> I've had enough experience with it [posing questions during discussion], and I know what I need to do to challenge them, or to make them be angered or opinionated about a viewpoint. I can see what the students are interested in.

Although eliciting angry responses from students might assist Frank's discussions at times, he pointed out that he was careful to bring closure to the discussion. He never wanted students to leave class upset or agitated, so time was always available for students to "discuss the discussion." During this closure activity, students apologized for inappropriate comments and clarified misunderstandings.

Teachers also play "the Devil's advocate" with students, often questioning anything that is said. Alex reported that he assumed this role, hoping his students would "logic through the information and be more thoughtful about the ideas they formed." His emphasis was on eliciting "logic," rather than the emotion that Frank described. Teachers attempt to strike a balance between using logic and using emotion when challenging student responses.

Deborah said it was all right to take an "opposing view if you have to," but she was concerned about students becoming offended when she did. She told her students that she was not necessarily identifying with the opposition, but was representing the thinking from it. Instead of starting

with "I think...," she used "What if I thought...?"

> I guess I use [this approach] because I am trying to get them to see that there are other points of view because they [the students' perspectives] are so narrow...they often come from very narrow backgrounds, so they hide behind this "I know this is right" attitude. So I will say something like, "Well, what if it were different than you believe?"

Teachers think this conception is useful when they detect that their students are biased, have not considered other points of view, or have a shallow understanding of what is being discussed. In each case, the questions intend to expand student thinking. Since teachers want students to examine their own understanding and opinions, teachers need to loosen their control over the interactions. As Cathy suggested, teachers are faced with a dilemma between wanting students to think on their own and wanting to lead students to a particular conclusion:

> Sometimes I hope they will [answer in certain ways, or answer certain questions], but they don't always...and I will accept that...I will accept what they come up with.

The purpose, thus is to challenge, rather than direct, student thinking.

5. Discussion as Guided Transfer of Knowledge

Teachers hope students will take into the world knowledge that is formed initially in the classroom. Discussion, when used to help students with this transfer, involves the generalization of knowledge acquired in school to non-school settings. These discussions engage students in a process of generalizing from particular facts and details to the circumstances in the larger world around them.

The role of teachers during discussion as guided transfer is similar to the role described for "teacher-directed" conversations, in that the teacher, more than the students, guides the discussion. It is different in that the objective is for each student to consider how school knowledge might prove useful in their life. Herein lies the distinctive value of these discussions: the very act of discussing allows students to connect what they learn in school to their own life in ways other methods of instruction may not be able to help them do. As Cathy said, it involves students "in problem solving...the talk is about what is in the book and is then applied to current events" (emphasis hers). She continued:

> [My] main point for discussion is that...you can effectively use the inductive process. How does what we learned about "there and then" relate today? How is it similar, how is it different, and what are some conclusions we can draw?

In other words, the process of discussing encourages students to carry historical and background knowledge (the "then and there") from school settings to their lives outside of school (the "here and now").

When linking historical events to the present, students and teacher discuss not so much to learn about a particular historical event, but to learn how that event has affected the present. It is the process of discussing that provides the learning. Again, Cathy explained:

> What I like best about the discussion method is we can take an idea that is presented in the material, and then allow the students to explore the ideas, the consequences, the ramifications of the things that they hadn't considered in just straight textbook-ordered, formal presentation..., a lecture or film, or if you did a worksheet for the reading.

Similarly, Alex reported using discussions to help students "make analogies and...connections between the past and the present." Perennial problems, he believed, affect us repeatedly over time. He used discussion to help his students recognize links between problems that seem unconnected on the surface, but share a similar underlying problem. He continued:

> as far as I'm concerned that is what makes history come alive...What's so different about the

> problems that the Greeks dealt with and with what we deal with today?

Bill commented similarly, "I am a real proponent of taking what you do in class and making sure there is a link to the political realm. A real, not a make-believe, a real link."

For Alex, these discussions require students to develop a "higher level of thinking skills" about the subject under discussion. He described higher-order thinking as the ability to organize a collection of information about one topic so it could inform a different, related topic.

Similarly, Bill reported using guided-transfer-of-knowledge discussions to provide an opportunity for students to "synthesize" their knowledge in order to make it clear to others. In other words, students had to put several different ideas together in their own words. Students' comments then represented this reformulation of their knowledge. Bill offered additional insight:

> it is the <u>process</u> [of discussion] that I'm most intrigued with. I think the process of dialogue, of exchanging ideas, is fundamental to a democratic society. If they can do it in this artificial environment, then I think I'm guaranteed...that they will then continue those kinds of dialogues at their places of employment, at the dinner table at home, or in a public forum. (emphasis his)

Additionally, the process of discussing, teachers believe, increases student motivation to make connections between what they talk about in school and what is happening in the world around them. Elaine referred to this directly when she said, "Discussion causes students to feel they have a voice now, and they start taking interest in Time magazine or reading the newspaper because it has something in it that we talked about in class." She continued:

> Parents have given me lots of positive feedback because their kids are coming home and talking about stuff that they learned. Because now it's their own. They heard another person say something that they disagree with, or that they don't know about, and suddenly they are motivated to go check it out.

The result of this motivation is more in-depth learning about a topic, which helps students recognize connections between topics and concepts rather than merely comparing facts.

6. Discussion as Practice at Verbal Interactions

Classroom discussions are not always used to teach subject-specific content. Teachers at times plan discussions so students may practice engaging in verbal interactions with one another. They believe that students become better discussants when they watch the teacher model appropriate behavior during a discussion, then receive opportunities to

practice engaging in discussions. Under this conception, teachers think of discussion as a skill that requires practice sessions. Bill explained that "[Discussion] is nothing you walk into. It is something you literally teach the students to do over a period of time."

This conception is similar to "discussion as open-ended conversation," but their purposes are different. Open-ended conversations begin around a teacher-determined topic or question, then diverge so students can experience the free-flow of ideas often present in adult conversations. "Practice discussions," by comparison, may or may not begin around a teacher-determined topic or question. The primary purpose is to develop in students the interaction skills they need for discussions.

Teachers justify the departure from course curriculum and use of class time for this practice because they believe students need experience talking and interacting with one another. Their hope is that future discussions, about issues more pertinent to the curriculum, will be more refined as a result of the practice sessions. Elaine recalled that she set time aside for these types of discussions from the first day of school. She found that students needed practice speaking and interacting:

> when I want them to think [and talk] on their own, they get really nervous. [Some] say 'we are too nervous, don't make us talk.' Well you know, I

> make them. I spend time the first few weeks of class doing something called "warm-ups"...We have a topic of the day or a question of the day. It may be anything from a topic in the news such as "How do you feel about gays in the military," to "What was the best thing about your three-day weekend?" It doesn't matter, it is whatever they choose. And I model it first..Then [a student] introduces a topic and has to give their example or their answer. Then we go around the room.

Deborah said the development of students' "social skills and the recognition of their abilities...is an absolute requirement" for successful discussions, and these both occur as students practice discussing.

Teachers will not stop practice-discussions when they digress from the course curriculum. They believe such digressions provide further practice in developing skills needed for linguistic interactions. Students are able to discuss most any topic of their choosing, since the purpose is to develop skill at interacting verbally. Frank explained:

> I let it [discussion] go where the students like, because as long as I can see that people are scratching their head and thinking, and that they have some point of view that others might react to, that's fine with me and I'll let them

> continue. We are often going off in another direction. But I would guess that someone coming into the class cold, or someone who didn't spend every day with us might say "what the heck is going on?" But I don't care, as long as I can see that they are engaged in what's happening in here and get something out of it..that's enough.

Cathy claimed to plan discussions in which students defended a particular opinion. These opinions were often student selected and often had nothing to do with the course curriculum. The emphasis was on the students' ability to support their opinions with facts:

> students need the practice of learning facts and opinions and accumulating facts in order to support a certain argument or point of view.

Teachers are concerned about teaching subject matter (i.e., U. S. history teachers want to teach U. S. history). Bill, for example, said he tried to connect his practice-interactions to course content. To him, a practice discussion was a "structured dialogue" where students "talk together" with him. He put his students in a situation:

> that will allow, encourage, almost require students to talk with one another about a particular topic. Could be in a small group setting, or could be a student-led large group discussion...You know I have, in the U. S. history

> classes, lots of discussions in that I don't lecture...we do a lot of talking together about historical events, time periods, peoples, but there is a lot of structured dialogue there as well.

One purpose of "practicing" is for students to learn behavior appropriate for classroom discussions, and then act accordingly. Many of these discussions end quickly, at first, as students learn what is and what is not appropriate. Alex limited the topics and opinions that students put forth:

> I think you have a right to express your opinions, but there are acceptable and not acceptable opinions to express. If someone starts talking about how to remove the current form of government and replace it with an Aryan Nation type of a government, then that is not an acceptable opinion to put forth.

Generally, though, teachers have surprisingly few rules for students during these practice discussions, other than to listen and respect their classmates' rights to share their opinions and ideas. They often do not teach a specific list of "do's and don't's." Teachers emphasize the intent of rules, rather than the rules themselves. Elaine accomplished this through explicit instruction:

> I spend a lot of time at the beginning of class

> teaching them about respect and about listening, and that it is important to have a voice and also to let others to have a voice, and the whole process of discernment.

Alex recalled telling his students to respect others and not offend classmates:

> it's very essential that they respect each others' ideas...I tell them I don't care what you say as long as it's not personal, against anyone here at school, anybody in this classroom, against your teacher, and it's within good taste, you can go ahead and say it. OK? and that's kind of the ground rules. Also, you must listen to other people.

The practice from these discussions helps classroom interactions, but teachers see them as also helping students engage in discussions outside of the classroom. Frank said he believed that discussion skills help citizens in a democracy communicate better:

> Discussion is almost a type of democracy. I think that we are at the point now where we yell at each other, the way this country is going. I would hope that from what they do in here they would see this and say "wait a minute, it's OK even if I don't agree with someone else." And from that point of view the discussion is defensible.

Elaine said she found that practicing discussion skills helped students in nonschool, social settings:

> kids who go through my classes are learning communication skills so they are becoming better speakers, they are more confident with guests at home, for example, or more able to raise questions to their parents, or more able to find other points of view. So it's kind of a liberating thing for the kids to learn these personal, social skills. It's one thing to be grappling with [course] content, but they are also growing personally.

Summary of Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion

Below is a thumbnail description of the six conceptions. Illustrative statements from my sample are included after each.

1. Discussion as recitation. Teacher asks questions, students respond, and teacher evaluates responses. Information is distributed quickly and efficiently: "If I were reviewing for a test...or wanted to make sure students had read the textbook and understand the main points presented, I will lead a discussion [that seeks specific answers to questions]." Cathy

2. Discussion as teacher-directed conversation. Teachers direct a conversation with students to help students

understand a topic or "point." Students are encouraged to contribute any information they know, and teacher judges its relevance to the lesson's objective. "There are...discussions that I try to construct that definitely will get students from point A to point B. There is a light bulb that I want to ultimately turn on, whether it's a piece of knowledge, or a concept I want them to understand." Bill

3. Discussion as open-ended conversation. Teacher and students freely share what they know about a predetermined topic. These discussions become debates or heated arguments over a limited number of points. Teachers introduce the topic, then participate in the discussion but do not direct it. "[D]uring the discussion, [students] fed off of each other. That's what discussion ought to be. It ought to be people who are just bursting with a contribution or a question that leads to something else." Deborah

4. Discussion as challenging questions. Teachers pose questions to students but do not evaluate responses. Instead, additional questions are asked to challenge and puzzle student assumptions and logic, and to develop thinking skills. This type of discussion is often equated with a technique called the "Socratic Method." "Ask questions, and never give any answers, but pose problems in questions and not draw things to a close." Cathy

5. Discussion as guided transfer of knowledge. Teacher and students apply knowledge of the past to the present, and

transfer knowledge acquired in class to other situations and circumstances. Teachers act as a guide and help students generalize particular facts and ideas to the larger world around them. "How does what we learned about 'there and then' relate today? How is it similar, how is it different, and what are some conclusions we can draw?" Cathy

6. Discussion as practice at verbal interaction. Teachers think of discussion as a skill that requires practice. They believe that students become better discussants when they receive both modeling from the teacher about appropriate behavior during a discussion, and opportunities to practice engaging in discussions. "[Discussion] is nothing you walk into. It is something you literally teach the students to do over a period of time." Bill

Factors Influencing Uses of Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion

I now shift my focus to the fourth ancillary question of the dissertation: What seems to influence teachers' use of discussion? Teachers are aware that discussion requires student involvement. When they plan discussion, they reflect on factors that may hinder student participation. In this section I describe five factors that influence teachers' uses of different conceptions of discussion:

1. Student diversity

2. Lesson objectives
3. Age and maturity of students
4. Sense of community in the classroom
5. Interest level of students

Teachers seem to consider these factors when they think about the appropriateness and effectiveness of teaching with discussion. As with the conceptions, these influencing factors are presented as hypotheses that are grounded in data and tentative, pending additional rounds of data gathering and analysis. Below I describe each of the five factors, providing illustrations drawn from the data. Per the canons of grounded theory, when describing the factors, I will again use the present tense and speak generally of "teachers" rather than of "these six teachers."

1. Student Diversity

Teachers see student diversity--differences in areas such as cultural background, ethnicity, gender, race, learning styles, and ability--positively and negatively. Diversity offers the potential for an increased awareness of different perspectives and ideas. Students with different backgrounds may provide a wide range of viewpoints about an issue. As Alex mentioned, if no one had a different perspective or point of view than his, then the discussions would quickly end, and the teacher would be "pontificating by himself" without presenting alternative perspectives on a

topic. Diversity also has social benefits because it requires students to interact with classmates with whom they typically may not have contact during the school day.

Teachers think that student diversity increases conflict and disagreement when students question and challenge one another. This often results because students do not understand other students who are different from them, be it a point of view or ability level. Teachers report that they talk more, and begin to dominate the classroom interactions, when their students become embroiled in conflict. By limiting student talk, teachers control the voicing of different ideas and opinions.

While student differences seem to impact the teacher during discussions, they also lead teachers to plan lessons differently from class to class. In mentioning the diversity of students and personalities in his classroom, Alex said that "classrooms have personalities...I can't do the same thing with one class that I can do with the other; it's just the mix." Similarly, though Frank recalled that he often planned to have the same discussion in two different classes, it did not necessarily happen that way: "Even though there are only two or three different courses, everything seems to be different with each of my classes."

Teachers are aware of the differences between boys and girls during discussions. Only one of the teachers I interviewed, Frank, did not believe gender differences were

a concern during classroom discussions. He said that boys and girls may have different ideas but are equally able to present their ideas and questions to the class. He does not recall gender differences creating problems among his students, though he is aware that "literature" about gender inequity is present: "I'm aware that a lot of folks are saying that you reward guys, and that you have different standards for girls. I have had no complaints about this from my students."

When teachers are aware of gender differences during class discussions, they encourage equal participation by altering instructional techniques. Bill was quite direct about gender, commenting that girls and boys talk differently. He said boys talk more frequently, but when girls do talk it is after more reflection. He explained that "boys tend to just spout off and not necessarily think through what they are going to say whereas girls really have thought through it ahead of time." He attempted to overcome the high frequency of talk from boys by directing his comments to girls and telling his classes about his observations of gender differences during discussions.

Elaine's comment was similar: "Women aren't as willing to voice opinions...I think that unless you teach the boys to listen to the girls, and teach the girls to speak, we won't lose the gender thing." She mentioned that girls may feel especially intimidated when they are in discussions with

exuberant, loud boys. She recounted a time when two girls were asked to give an opinion after three loud boys gave theirs: "you hardly heard the girls who followed them, real quiet, real hurried, like they didn't think anybody was listening."

Differences in gender and cultural background are not the only ones that teachers notice among students. Students may refuse to engage in classroom discussions, believing their contributions are not valued by the class. Teachers think that students choose to not to participate because they feel they are in some way "different" from the rest of the class, are shy, represent a minority view, differ racially from the majority of the class, or because they believe they do not have a voice in society. This concerns teachers because discussion is meant to encourage participation and learning, not thwart it. Alex's comment, though replete with generalizations, expresses how gender and racial or ethnic background might affect a classroom discussion:

> Some kids are workers and they don't like to talk..I mean I can think of some girls who always hand in their homework assignments, always do this, but don't talk...generally I find kids of certain minority backgrounds [Korean, Chinese] don't speak very much, they don't like controversy.

Some students "back out completely" from Cathy's discussions. "And the worst thing," she says, "is that they

feel they are shut down and shut out of the system. They don't count, they don't fit, they don't belong...and I really don't think that you're going to get those kids [to discuss]. Maybe, maybe sometimes you'll bring them into a discussion. I have a couple [African-American students] that I guess might get close to that level, but they are belligerent..they're angry." Cathy said she tried to deal with these feelings of anger and oppression by discussing it in the class. She has yet to be satisfied with the results, and believes it may be a result of the racial imbalance that is present in her classrooms (which consist of predominately white students). In addition to discussing these feelings, Cathy described how she positioned the chairs in her room in a semicircle to create a more informal setting and place the students closer to each other. Again, she was not convinced that this did any good in "bringing together" students who felt separated from the group.

A lower proficiency in the English language, according to teachers, limits what a student is able to share during a discussion. When students with low language competence are in a class with students who are fluent in English, students with greater speaking ability dominate the verbal interactions. Frank said he found that language and culture play a powerful role in determining who talks:

> [Students] come from different groups, and culturally it's really difficult to say who's to

> talk. Some kids aren't as comfortable [talking] as others. Some are uncomfortable [talking] because they don't have a grasp on the language...with a lot of kids here English is their second language. Especially when a lot of the Asian cultures are so much less individualistic... Sometimes talk is just...hard for them to do.

Deborah described two students who did not talk during discussion. One boy was reticent about talking because his "thoughts come slowly:"

> I don't think he's slow in IQ or whatever, but whatever it is, he doesn't process very fast. When you get talking to him one on one, he often has insights. They're just marvelous. But [during discussions], he's terrified because he just knows he would become confused and distressed.

The other boy participates freely and is very verbal when in a special education class. However, "in mainstreamed classes...if you ask him a question he will answer you, but he rarely initiates anything...He's intimidated."

2. Lesson Objectives

Discussion is considered to be a time-consuming method of instruction relative to other methods. Therefore,

teachers are more directing or controlling, and are more likely to dominate the interactions with their students during discussions, when their lesson objectives emphasize "covering" or "getting through" a predetermined amount of information. Alex, for example, when teaching an advanced placement United States history class, reported that he did not use discussion when he had to cover a large amount of information in a short time.

When students already possess information a teacher believes is important, or have spent time gathering background information before a classroom discussion, teachers assume a less dominant role. They also loosen control when they do not feel pressured to present a specific amount of information. They are more willing to allow extra time for student interactions because they believe discussions assist student learning. Alex's comment typified the other teachers' comments about this: "you can't rely on the kids to read these days, or to take very good notes...so they need to be able to interact and play with the information to figure it out."

Student knowledge about the topic of the discussion influences teachers' lesson objectives and conceptions of discussion. When students know less, teachers feel the need to be more active in the discussions, which leads to less interactions among students. Teachers want all of their students to know important points about the topic being

discussed, but students who know more tend to discuss more. As Alex said, "certain kids know all the answers and they dominate discussions, and the other kids don't learn...You can learn only so much by listening to all but one person answer all the questions, right?" (Then there are students who know very little, but will, as Elaine said, "spout off from the top of their head.")

Bill said that before most of his discussions, his students needed time to read and research the information they would be discussing. He commented on one particular discussion that he felt was very successful:

> What has really made this dialogue, this discussion, as rich as it was is the painful research that we did. [The students] went in and they may have looked at two hundred articles between them, and then ultimately brought all of that back into this arena.

Teachers' belief that students are becoming increasingly less willing to read affects teachers' attitudes about using discussion in the classroom. If a reading assignment provides students with important information for a discussion, then students who have not read are not prepared to engage in discussion. As Bill stated:

> These young men and women could have the finest writing skills, the finest public speaking skills, they could have confidence that would be equated

> to a mid-management person at Boeing, but without knowledge they have nothing to talk about (emphasis his).

He credited the research and reading that his students did for the success of a particular discussion about free trade agreements:

> if I would have given them just one or two resources to read and use, this discussion would not have had anywhere close to the depth that it had. I mean I had a forty-foot-long printout that I got from Info-Trak, and then I had gone through and highlighted potential articles for them to read.

Bill's requirements of his students do not seem to be the norm. Other teachers reported that they did not expect students to read and prepare to this extent, and often allowed class time for students to prepare. Teachers are frustrated by a lack of preparation by students. This led Elaine to go as far as doing "choral readings" with her classes before discussions: "I know that [reading together out loud] sounds 'babyish,' but I do it with them because those who haven't read are at a loss. So, I feel like, let's just do it right then and there." Cathy recalled that she increased the frequency of discussions about "textbook information" as a way for students who have read to share information with those who have not: "Students are reading

less and less. If they are going to read less, then they are going to have to discuss more."

Teachers report that absent students pose a great problem for using discussion. Students cannot "make up" the absence because the class discussion can not be recreated. When teachers present information by following a specific outline or "notes," absent students may be able to copy the information when they return to school. Merely copying down the teacher's notes is insufficient, however, if discussion is thought of as a technique that allows students to build their own understanding of an issue through verbal interactions. Teachers think that distributing information about a previous discussion is an inadequate way for absent students to "catch up," because much of the information is provided during the discussion. Recounting what happened during a discussion to an absent student is difficult for teachers because they do not believe they can recreate the exchange of ideas and knowledge-building that may have occurred. This is especially the case when teachers conceptualize discussion as posing challenging questions, and when discussions are open-ended. As Elaine stated, "They gotta be there...I do have kids who come in and say, 'I missed two days, I was sick, what did we do?' And I just don't know where to start."

3. Age and Maturity of Students

Teachers do not use discussion in the same way across their several classes. They discriminate, more likely conducting discussion in classes that have what they call more "mature" students--students they describe as some combination of older, more knowledgeable, less defensive, and more socially adept. Students' maturity is also a consideration when teachers decide how much control they will exert during a discussion. Less mature students lead teachers to assume a more controlling position (as in recitation); more mature students encourage teacher participation from a less controlling position (as in open-ended conversations).

Cathy, Alex, Frank, and Elaine each reported that the students in the lowest grade level at their school were prone to adopt a specific opinion and argue it without listening to others, and without taking other points of view into consideration. Cathy's comment is representative of the others:

> sophomores [more so than seniors] argue...more than discuss. They argue...there is a need to be right, and be heard...The less mature, or the younger (students), are less likely to have the ability to "give up" favorite and long held opinions.

Elaine suggested that discussions were difficult with

younger students because they "need so much structure." She has had limited success engaging ninth-graders in open-ended discussions. The need to continuously direct students toward the topic being discussed, and emphasize socially acceptable behaviors during discussion, made it difficult for Elaine to concentrate on her topic. Similarly, Deborah reported that immature behavior limited her ability to plan a discussion, because her students had difficulty interacting with one another:

> I spend so much time at it [correcting inappropriate behavior] that I never feel like we get the time to really interact in any kind of full way. We barely get a thought down and it is gone. There is no time to finish whatever it is. My focus seems to be so much on the relational aspect of dealing with these students that it doesn't seem to get to the subject or the content... Once I told them that my grandfather didn't practice medicine for six years after the Civil War...he said you don't live in a bloodbath and forget it. We began to examine the horrors of war. They listened to that. A pin could have dropped. And then we tried to talk about it, and one kid started talking about blood and gore and shooting people's heads off. And that was the end of the discussion.

Teachers emphasize that maturity is related to the type of discussion they select. Whether a discussion is an "exchange of ideas" or a "debate," often is the result of the amount of maturity that teachers believe their students have. More maturity is needed when the purpose of the verbal interactions is to express different perspectives and increase students' general understanding about a particular topic (exchanging ideas). Less maturity is necessary if the nature of the interactions focus on winning, or on competing against opposing viewpoints (debate).

Bill expressed this idea when he explained that older students often are more mature and thus can "step away from the discussion" and not be solely focused on presenting their personal view. He emphasized that students need skills in discussing, and that these skills require instruction. He suggested that younger students are capable of discussing, but need to know "how to participate" in classroom discussions. He contended that those discussions relying on student input require "quite a bit of practice in learning how to discuss." During an interview, Bill mentioned that age differences of high school students will not pose much of a problem for discussion provided that the students receive direction about how to discuss:

> I think age has something to do with it [the ability of students to engage in discussions], but the chronological differences between sophomores,

> juniors, and seniors is not so great that good tutelage can't overcome.

Another way in which the maturity of students is a factor pertains to their previous experience with classroom discussion. Students who have rarely shared their ideas verbally with others in a classroom lack an understanding about how to do so. As a result, they act defensive, argue, and debate with one another during classroom discussions. Alex suggested that sophomores insist on sticking to their opinion because they lack experience critiquing information presented to them by a teacher, a textbook, or by classmates:

> (Students) have never been taught to think themselves, they don't take the time to read a sentence out of a text and disagree with it or question. They just take it for granted. They are looking for facts instead of asking "why." That is difficult for discussions.

Elaine also described how previous experience with classroom discussion helps students become more mature discussants:

> They are not used to us (teachers) giving them the ball. So often teachers will present the stuff and not have very many people answer (the teacher's) questions...So then, when we want them to think on their own, they get really nervous.

Teachers are faced with a dilemma: they are hesitant to plan discussions when their students act immaturely, but they

believe that immature discussants need to engage in discussions if they are to become more skilled at it.[20]

Teachers implement rules for classroom discussion when they want more control over immature students, but generally the rules are kept to a minimum (as was described under "discussion as practice at verbal interaction"). To encourage more listening, they limit student interactions by requiring such behaviors as raising a hand before talking, and responding to the teacher rather than directly to a classmate. The interactions among students are thus mediated by the teacher, who grants permission for students to speak. This is done at the expense of discussion so students will hear their classmates' thoughts and ideas. Alex described students' inability to listen leads to additional rules: "I have a problem with my sophomores [in that] they won't listen to each other. They tend to get angry...kids have a problem with not accepting other people's opinions. There's a real lack of open-mindedness. I think it is very essential that they respect each others' ideas."

4. Sense of Community in the Classroom

Another factor influencing teachers' use of discussion is the degree to which a sense of community develops in the classroom. "Community" is comprised of attributes such as:

[20]One way teachers resolve this "dilemma of experience" is by planning "practice discussions" (explained under teachers' conceptions).

trust and respect for one another, feelings of personal safety, an appropriate size of the group, and common goals for exploring issues and course-content together. When teacher and students view the class as a community, they are more inclined to interact with one another. Teachers, for example, may use discussion during first period, but not use it during second period because of a different sense of community present in the second group of students.

Inherent in this idea of a classroom community is the need to respect and trust people, something that does not happen without effort by the teacher and willingness by the students. Teachers make efforts to earn students' trust, and students are held accountable to respect their classmates. Elaine said this was a training process: "I train them from the beginning to become a learning community...there is an atmosphere of trust." Deborah simply described it as a sense that the group "had really good feelings toward each other." Frank explained further:

> [To lead a discussion] I have to work hard to gain their trust. They've got to see me in roles other than being just inside the classroom. At games, and being involved and so forth. They've got to see that I'm a real person. Kids don't believe a teacher unless they see you are involved in other parts of their lives. I think they need to see that. I don't think I need that same trust for a

> lecture [as I do for a discussion]...Kids have got to trust me, and they have to trust each other. Because if they don't trust each other, then they will never share their real ideas.

When teachers want their students to share ideas and opinions during a discussion, they are acutely aware of the classroom community. For example, concerns about the effect of student diversity (explained previously) are often alleviated if teachers believe a group of students has developed an atmosphere of respect within the classroom. In other words, students might be very diverse in a number of areas but still engage in fruitful discussions if there is an underlying sense of respect and trust in the classroom. Deborah described what happened when a small group of twelve students lacked trust and respect for one another:

> I cannot see some of my students being able to interact [during discussions] because of the dynamics of them [the students]. I think it's just because they have this history. This anti-social kind of history. They've known one another, some of them, since they were eight, nine years old...And they have been together too long. So, they know each other's weaknesses just better than you can imagine. They know who they can pick on and who they can't. And they make one another's lives miserable.

Because teachers want their classroom to be a safe haven for sharing new ideas and opinions, they are concerned about the degree of personal safety their students feel in the classroom. When students suspect that comments made during a discussion may be mocked or used against them outside of class, they are less likely to share their ideas or opinions in class. While respect for classmates has some control over student behavior, concern about retribution outside of class seems to control some students more. Frank explained it this way:

> these guys are a little more careful maybe than they are in the suburbs...because think of the consequences in the middle of the city when a discussion goes from [civil interactions] to being an argument. Things could get dangerous. I think, maybe even subconsciously, these kids are aware of it. So, I rarely see shouting matches or arguments. And, when those occur, that's where it's gotten out of control. I would guess my classes are a lot nicer to each other than classes in suburbs. Because they've learned to be nice. It's kind of required... because the consequences of having a lot of anger can be really pretty destructive.

Another factor affecting classroom community is class size. As size increases, the sense of community decreases;

a class with 35 students will not be as "close" (physically or socially) as a class with 15 students. Since teachers usually have classes with 25 to 30 students, discussion is not always the preferred method of instruction. Discussions do occur with as few as 2 students, but teachers believe the optimal number of students for a classroom discussion is between 5 and 20. This size offers the chance to hear diverse opinions about the topic, but is not so large that students are hesitant to speak because their sense of community is lessened. Bill's comments suggested this:

> I'm not sure you can lead a discussion with thirty-four people, that's one of the problems, I'm not sure you can do it with twenty-five. With fifteen, with ten, I think you can be much more successful.

5. Interest Level of Students

Students need to be interested in a topic in order to participate in a discussion on that topic, and they must believe that discussion is a worthwhile method of instruction. If teachers determine that their students will not be interested, then discussion is not used. Even if a discussion is planned, teachers seem willing to abandon it if student interest in the topic is low. Frank's comment is typical of the others':

> There are a variety of reasons [for low student

> interest]...Could be everybody is sleepy. Could be the topic is boring. Could be my prep wasn't good enough... My role is if I see that we are not going anywhere, there is no point in continuing. We will stop and do something else.

Cathy reported that she avoids using discussion when she believes that outside influences will distract students' attention. As she said, "Friday afternoon discussions will likely fail."

Elaine recalled that she stopped a discussion about the Missouri Compromise because her students "were not engaged in the discussion." She had them write a one-paragraph description of the account in the textbook instead, "because talking did not work. [The planned discussion] was a failure because they weren't interested in doing it." Alex explained that some students dislike classroom discussions because "they are looking for facts instead of asking 'why.'" Frank said he often supplemented textbook accounts by telling stories to his students. He believed that "a lot of people just do not want to talk. They want to hear me recount a set of experiences."

Since students are integral to classroom discussions, teachers are willing to change their method of instruction (i.e., use a method other than discussion) when student interest is low. If many students are not participating, then teachers fear learning is not occurring, and alternative

methods of instruction are used. When teachers believe student interest in a topic will be low, they often shun discussion and rely on what Elaine called "staying with the facts from the book."

Another strategy for overcoming a lack of student interest is to connect the discussion topic to issues the students enjoy. For example, school policies on smoking, dress codes, or school clubs are often interesting to students, and often provide fertile topics for discussion. Unfortunately, however, they usually have little relation to the curriculum of the course. Often what happens is a discussion that is interesting to the students, but not pertinent to course content.

Closely tied to student interest is the idea that students must believe discussion is a worthwhile method of instruction. Students who do not want to exert the effort needed for discussion, or who believe teacher-dominated instruction or seat/bookwork is the best way to be taught, pose a formidable challenge to teachers planning to use discussion. Deborah described how her "special ed" students came to class with what she called a

> lazy, uninterested attitude. You would think that here is the opportunity for anything, for discussion, for making sure everyone has their work done because they have similar classes through the day...It should be wonderful. It isn't. They think it is their time to

unravel, to play games.

Frank claimed it was more difficult to use discussion in his advanced placement U. S. history class, than in his "regular" classes because

> the honors kids [advanced placement students] are paranoid about grades and become more nervous about discussion. They're not as open about it because they worry about the reading, and they worry about saying certain things that might be wrong more than the regular track kids.

He also said that his advanced placement students thought discussion was a waste of their class time because they saw it as a "filler" activity. When students do not see value in discussion, they will not be as willing to participate in it, and teachers feel pressure to use more teacher-led methods of instruction.

While teachers want all of their students to interact verbally with each other during classroom discussions, students who are silent can still benefit and may be learning from discussion as much as those who are actively discussing. Alex, for example, believed that "twenty percent, maybe as much as thirty percent, tend to talk. They, tend to dominate the talk, and the others don't talk." He did not know how to get the "non-talkers" more active, but he did believe that students do not have to be talking in order to be learning. Listening to a discussion allows them to learn as well.

Teachers express two concerns about non-talking students, however. First, discussions are not easy or desirable if a limited number of people are talking. If a student likes to talk, then that student dominates the discussion, and multiple viewpoints are unavailable. Second, when students do not talk, there is no way of knowing whether they are engaged in the topic. They may be learning and thinking as much as those talking, or they may be completely disconnected from the conversation.

Summary of Factors Influencing Uses of Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion

Below are brief summaries of the five factors.

1. Student diversity. Teachers recognize that students in a classroom are not identical. They come together each class period with differences in cultural background, ethnicity, gender, race, learning styles, and ability. Teachers see classroom diversity positively and negatively, and often weigh these differences when planning classroom discussions.

2. Lesson objectives. Discussion is considered to be a time-consuming method of instruction relative to other methods. As a result, teachers are more likely to dominate classroom interactions when the objectives of a lesson emphasize learning a specific body of information in a

specific amount of time. Teachers who plan discussions so students will build their own understanding during the interactions allow for the extra time needed during discussions.

3. Age and maturity of students. Teachers do not use discussion in the same way across their several classes. They discriminate, more likely conducting discussion in classes that have what they call more "mature" students--students they describe as some combination of older, more knowledgeable, less defensive, and more socially adept. More maturity is needed when the purpose of the verbal interactions is to express different perspectives and increase the students' general understanding about a particular topic.

4. Sense of community in the classroom. The sense of community that teachers and students perceive in the classroom affects discussion. When teacher and students view the class as a community, they are more inclined to interact with one another. "Community" is comprised of attributes such as: trust and respect for one another, feelings of personal safety, an appropriate size of the group, and common goals for exploring issues and course-content together.

5. Interest level of students. In order for discussion to work in the classroom, students need to have an interest in the topic being discussed, and they must believe that discussion is a worthwhile method of instruction. Teachers

consider very seriously their students' interest level in the discussion topic. If they determine a low level of interest, then discussion is not used. Likewise, if students do not value discussion as a method of instruction, then teachers will use less-interactive methods of instruction.

Summary of Findings

My purpose in this fourth chapter was to describe six conceptions of discussion and five factors that influence the use of these conceptions. The six conceptions of classroom discussion that emerged from the data were:

1. Discussion as recitation
2. Discussion as teacher-directed conversation
3. Discussion as open-ended conversation
4. Discussion as posing challenging questions
5. Discussion as a guided transfer of knowledge
6. Discussion as practice at verbal interaction

The five factors influencing the use of particular conceptions of discussion were:

1. Student diversity
2. Lesson objectives
3. Age and maturity of students
4. Sense of community in the classroom
5. Interest level of students

For each conception, and for each factor influencing their use, I provided an explanation and excerpts from the data as

support. These hypotheses provide a theory-in-process of teachers' conceptions of discussion, and factors that may influence how teachers use discussion.

In the next chapter I will suggest what has been learned from these findings. I explore three areas of insight, and I examine limitations and implications of the findings.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

Purpose of the Chapter

The purpose of this final chapter is to suggest how my findings contribute to the research literature on classroom discussion. In this chapter, I also consider how classroom discussion practice might benefit from this study.

Plan

My plan for this final chapter is the following. First, I discuss what my findings might add to previous research on discussion. Second, I assess the limitations of the study. Third, I suggest implications of the findings for teachers, teacher educators, and future research. Finally, I summarize the chapter and the dissertation.

What Have We Learned?

What this study has provided, in short, is insight into teacher thinking about classroom discussion. In the previous chapter, I presented a set of conceptions that teachers have of discussion, and a set of factors that seem to influence teachers' use of these conceptions of discussion. Little integration of these two sets was done in this study. Clearly, connections between and among them need to be

explored. Establishing a set of conceptions and a set of factors that influence their use suggests several future studies: examine conceptions of discussion in other sample sets (e.g., teachers outside of the social studies, conceptions of middle-level teachers, etc.); theorize further from my data with an eye toward connecting conceptions of discussion with factors influencing the use of discussion; identify relationships among teachers' conceptions of discussion that might lead to a more generalized theory about teachers' conceptions; and examine connections among teacher-differences and the conceptions. Later in this chapter, I provide more details about possibilities for future research.[21]

While additional theorizing along these lines is certainly warranted, findings presented in the present study constitute a meaningful unit of study. Teachers' conceptions of discussion and the factors that influence the use of these conceptions have received little research attention; the theoretical categories presented here help to fill this gap and set the stage for the development of a more formal theory about teachers and discussion. In the remainder of this section, I will focus on three aspects of this study that contribute to research on conceptions of classroom discussion.

[21]I describe this in the section labeled "Implications."

Complexity of Conceptions

Teachers have multiple conceptions of discussion. This may explain why prior research has claimed that teachers will label any teacher-student interaction as "discussion" (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1984, 1990; Gall & Gall, 1990; Wilen, 1990). This conclusion, however, does not fully credit teachers with the amount of thought they give to classroom interactions. On the surface, teachers will call most classroom interactions discussion, but in their mind they differentiate between different types of discussion, with each having specific characteristics and purposes. Teachers think differently about discussion based on what they hope to accomplish during a lesson.

Teachers do consider recitation to be a type of discussion, but this is not their only conception. They also use discussion to accomplish higher-level cognitive goals such as understanding multiple perspectives, building knowledge, and developing thinking skills. They see value in the process of discussing as well as in the product or outcome of the discussion. Teachers believe it is the talk that occurs during discussion that helps students understand a particular topic better. Barnes' (1992) recommended the same use of discussion when he claimed that we talk our way into insight through "rough draft" and "final draft" talk.

When teachers think about discussion, they parallel the research literature on teacher thinking in general: they

pull from a collection of knowledge, theories, and beliefs while teaching. This "collection" affects how they plan a lesson, teach a lesson, and later reflect about a lesson (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Planning a discussion, and interacting with students during one, is "thoughtful work" (Freeman, 1993, p. 485). Teachers may have a particular conception of discussion when planning a lesson. However, once the class session begins, their thinking is influenced by students and the dynamics of the interactions. Teachers constantly assess whether a discussion is accomplishing the purpose they have for using it. They may modify the student-to-student interactions based on their assessment of the discussion's ability to accomplish this predetermined purpose. Teachers may even stop a discussion, and switch to a different method of instruction, if they are not satisfied with the type of talk that is occurring during the lesson. This assessment is what Clark and Peterson (1986) referred to as the ability teachers have to use an "adaptive array of responses to perceived task demands" of teaching (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 292). It suggests that teachers think about different types of discussion when planning a discussion, and while the discussion is taking place.

Student Influences

Students are a powerful factor that influence teachers' actions. Teachers think about their students' ability and

willingness to discuss when they decide if they will use discussion, and when they determine what type of discussion is most appropriate. Four of the five factors that influence the use of discussion were closely related to students' characteristics (student diversity, age and maturity of students, sense of community in the classroom, and interest level of students). Only one (lesson objectives) was directly related to course content. Teachers report that the need for student involvement during discussion leads them to think about their students when planning for discussion, and likely causes teachers to use methods of instruction that are less-dependent on student participation when students are judged unable, or unwilling, to discuss.

The perceptions teachers have of their students influence them in a number of ways. During the interviews, both teachers of the advanced placement U. S. history course (Alex and Frank) reported that the pressure to prepare for a nation-wide "A. P. history exam" limited their use of discussion. Their students complained that class discussions did not provide as much information as lecture or "textbook work." The teachers said their students thought of discussion as a non-academic activity, and as a result did not take it seriously. This was especially the case when the conclusions from the discussion were not graded or determined to be "right" or "wrong" (e.g., as might be the case when discussion is used to expose students to multiple

perspectives). This "lack of acceptance" by students resulted in more teacher-led activities (i.e., worksheets, direct-instruction).[22] Rather than defending the decision to use discussion, or requiring students to behave appropriately during a classroom discussion, teachers deferred to students, and moved away from discussion.

These findings elaborate prior conclusions that methods of instruction reflect teachers' desires to achieve and maintain classroom control. McNeil (1986) found that "defensive teaching" results when teachers fear they are losing control. Defensive teaching reduces course content to worksheets, lists, and "brief 'right' answers, easily transmitted, easily answered, easily graded" and easily controlled (p. 157). Metz (1978) noted that lower-achieving classes often received structured written work, with little to no opportunities for verbal interactions, "as a device to quiet a class or to keep it calm" (p. 103). These may sometimes be wise practices, but they also may be largely illusory, based perhaps on race, ability-level, or other prejudices about a particular group of students. The teachers I interviewed reported that they did not use discussion when students neither valued it nor thought the analytical thinking it required was useful to their learning.

[22]This discounting of discussion by upper track students was notably similar to students in lower track history courses who saw discussion as an opportunity to relax and not think too rigorously.

In addition, teachers said they reduced their use of discussion in poorly-behaved classes because managing student behavior problems during the interactions was too difficult.

One final aspect of the influence of students on teachers and discussion was suggested when I explored differences between my two sets of teachers. When teachers were faced with a classroom of diverse students (as was often the case in the urban school), they recalled that classroom discussion was frequently used to build a sense of community in the classroom, and establish lines of communication among the students. When classrooms had less-diverse students (as was the case in the suburban school) teachers said that the objectives for discussion were more often focused on course content, and focused less on social or relational objectives. More, or less, student diversity in a classroom (i.e., differences in races, ethnicities, abilities, etc.) may affect the content and purpose of the discussions.

All of the teachers at the urban school emphasized discussion as a way to increase student-student relationships. Two of these teachers mentioned that the students in their classes needed classroom discussion more for the social benefits than for learning course content. The opposite was true with the suburban teachers. Those teachers each emphasized the role of discussion in providing information to students. They rarely used discussion to

build social and relational skills among students.[23]

Leading Discussion

Teachers believe that their leadership role during classroom discussion is critical to the success of the discussion. While this does not imply that teachers want to control all of the interactions, it does imply that teachers are not always comfortable with a role equal to that of student/participant. Teachers report that they lead differently depending on the conception of discussion to which they are adhering. They are, however, very involved in the classroom interactions regardless of the type of discussion taking place. The classroom teacher's participation is critical to the success of the classroom discussion. The self-perceived roles of teachers during recitation-style discussions are apparent: teachers determine what information is important, distribute it to the class, and evaluate students--typically with questions. Their role changes for other conceptions, but does not lessen in importance. Even when teachers assume more the role of participant with students, they reported involvement in the interactions that are still different from the students because they regularly model appropriate behavior, assess the

[23]Both suburban and urban teachers think that discussion builds knowledge. However, the conceptions of knowledge appear to be different. The suburban teachers equate knowledge as "course content," while the urban teachers equate it more with "social ability."

accuracy of information being presented by students, and act as a monitor to insure the discussion serves the purpose for which it was planned.

During the interviews teachers described three ways they enhanced their instruction through discussion. First, they did what Dillon (1994) described as "falling silent." This often occurred after an introductory statement or after the teacher posed an initial question. It required students to talk, or respond, because the teacher did not talk. The literature on questioning often calls this "wait time," with the same purpose being served: If the teacher does not answer all the questions, the students will be urged to talk. When teachers wanted to encourage student-to-student talk, they tended to remain silent once students began discussing a topic with one another.

The second action described by teachers was their physical placement in the room. Other than during recitations, teachers tried to avoid the front of the room because they wanted to be perceived differently than a "stand-and-deliver" teacher. Three teachers I interviewed suggested that they wanted their students to talk freely with them, but worried that their position as "the teacher" often hindered this from happening. Teachers recalled numerous approaches for taking themselves "off stage:" moving to the side of the room, sitting in student chairs, and averting eye contact with students who appear to be talking to them rather

than to the group. The third action described by teachers was to arrange the desks, chairs, and other items in the room to a position where students could see each other better. This promoted more the feel of "face-to-face" interactions.

Limitations

In this section I describe five limitations of this study. These limitations occur both from assumptions going into the research, and from the design of the study.

The first limitation stems from my assumption that teachers' conceptions of discussion could be placed in discrete categories. I assumed that discussion was not a label for one type of instruction only, but likely labeled multiple forms of teacher-student interactions. As a result, I examined the data with an eye toward subtle distinctions in teachers' comments. While teachers use discussion to serve multiple purposes, and they characterize discussions differently because of these purposes, they do not neatly box their conceptions of discussion the way I did. Overlap among the conceptions likely occurs.

Closely associated with this first limitation is the second: The use of verbal self-reports. This research depends on teachers' reports of their use of discussion. The use of verbal self-reports for data has been criticized (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Researchers, however, have demonstrated that verbal self-reports can provide valid and

reliable data when effort is made to adhere to particular procedures (Claderhead, 1981; Ericcson & Simon, 1980; Peterson & Clark, 1978; Shavelson, Webb & Burstein, 1986). I used three recommended methods of data-collection to increase the reliability and validity of verbal self-reports: requiring teachers to think out-loud while they were engaged in a task; providing a stimulus that caused the teachers to recall previous discussions and report their thoughts or ideas; and asking teachers to make judgements or decisions about printed materials (Peterson & Clark, 1978; Shavelson, Webb & Burstein, 1986). While legitimate problems are inherent with verbal self-reports, I operated under the assumption that I could overcome these limitations with particular research methodology, and by not making sweeping claims about my findings.

A third limitation was the length of time I spent with each participant. I explored teachers' conceptions with two in-depth interviews, and two to four pre-research conversations with the teachers to learn about their background and experience with discussion. I do not know if these conceptions coincide with teachers actual use of discussion in the classroom, because I do not have observational data. While the structure of my data collection procedures encouraged teachers to share their thinking in great detail, it is arguable that additional interviews and observations could provide data that would

modify or overturn the theoretical categories generated here.

A fourth limitation has to do with the very nature of qualitative research and the limits on the generalizability of my findings. I can not extend the findings to other teachers, but rather to a theory about teachers. Such is the nature of generative research. Grounded theory provides a method for generalizing to a theory-in-process about teachers' conceptions of classroom discussion.

Finally, my sample selection limited this study in certain ways. I interviewed veteran social study teachers who used discussion in their classroom. This was a justifiable choice for generating a theory on conceptions of discussion. However, it left out novice teachers who use discussion, and teachers who may have conceptions of classroom discussion, though they do not teach with it. Clearly, previous research on discussion suggests that most teachers do not often teach with discussion. The teachers in my sample do use it, and may not be typical of teachers in general and social studies teachers in particular.

Implications

In this section I explore several implications. I have grouped them into three categories: implications for teachers, teacher educators, and future research.

Teachers

There are several implications of this study for classroom teachers. First, teachers who use discussion can compare their own thinking about discussion with the conceptions that emerged from the teachers I examined. Since teachers will probably not separate discussion into six categories, the list of conceptions may provide them with a new framework for thinking about different types of classroom discussion. Teachers might then engage in a form of "action research" where they compare teacher and student roles, characteristics, and purposes of their classroom discussions with my research findings. A purpose of these comparisons could be to improve teachers' understanding of discussion so that it is used more frequently during instruction.

A second implication for teachers (whether they use discussion or not) has to do with the perceived influence of students on classroom discussion. Awareness of this "student influence" could help teachers determine what factors are inhibiting or enhancing attempts to use discussion in their classrooms. Rather than deciding that discussion can not be used with a particular group of students, teachers might be able to identify what about the group hinders the discussion (e.g., lack of listening skills, too argumentative for fruitful exchanges of ideas, skepticism about the value of discussion as a method of instruction). Once identified, teachers could then concentrate on overcoming these

hindrances rather than caving into them. Teachers might also begin to examine the origin of their perceptions about the factors that influence discussion. Perhaps teachers have biases about using discussion in a particular way, in a specific setting, or with a certain group of students.

A third implication for teachers has to do with their involvement in the discussion. Planning and leading a discussion is a complex task for teachers. Their role during each conception of discussion is critical to the purpose of the discussion, even when discussion appears to be student driven (e.g., when it encourages student-to-student interactions). Before the discussion begins teachers should determine what their role will be and how they will facilitate the types of interactions they want to have. Though teachers' involvement will vary depending on the type of discussion, the teacher's presence during the interactions is important to the success of the discussion.

Finally, teachers need to be aware that not all students talk during discussion. Though a number of reasons may account for limited participation, my findings suggest two: gender and intimidation. Let me briefly describe each. Before I do, the reader should remember that these are teachers' beliefs about student participation. Other teachers may want to interview their own students to evaluate the reliability of these reasons.

Gender. Teachers concur with research that girls tend

to talk less than boys during class. Those teachers who recognized this trend in their discussions, and who tried to promote more gender-equitable discussions, reported some success. This indicates that teachers can help overcome gender bias, but it requires explicit talk in class about biases. Elaine's comment should be remembered by all teachers who teach with discussion: "Unless you teach the boys to listen to the girls, and teach the girls to speak, we won't lose the gender thing."

Intimidation. Teachers reported that intimidation was another reason students did not engage in discussions. Students who were lower in ability, culturally different, or had low proficiency in English often were self-conscious about their differences from the rest of the class, and did not verbally participate. Directing discussions with scripts and role-playing, or providing additional preparatory material to students who feel intimidated, might be ways to encourage participation by more students. Also, the atmosphere of the classroom is a powerful factor that should be considered. Teachers should ask themselves the following questions when considering whether the classroom atmosphere encourages or inhibits intimidation and gender bias: Do my students all believe this is a safe climate to share ideas? Is the class size appropriate for my purposes? Are comments respected and valued? Do my students share common goals for exploring issues and course-content together?

Teacher Educators

Teacher educators may or may not teach discussion as a method of instruction. I will suggest implications for each.

Those who do not teach discussion. Teacher educators should consider teaching the discussion method because of its potential to enhance student learning and democratic citizenship. Through classroom discussions, students might develop abilities to interact with others about issues of common interest. This is critical for a democratic system of government that values input from its citizens. Students, thought of as citizens-in-process, might learn how to engage in discussions with classmates of different races, genders, social status, and abilities. Teaching future teachers about using discussion as a method of instruction is an important step in democratic citizenship education. As a starting point, teacher educators might examine purposes and characteristics of the six conceptions with their students, and discuss which one(s) could best attain outcomes closely associated with democratic citizenship.

Additionally, constructivist thought suggests that students learn subject matter better when they are required to organize it themselves and develop an individualized understanding of the concepts being taught. Several conceptions of discussion (teacher-directed conversations, posing challenging questions, and guided transfer of knowledge) encourage this type of learning. Discussion is a

valuable tool for teachers to have in their collection of instructional methods, especially in light of long standing calls for educators to teach problem-solving skills and to promote conceptual understanding of material. Using classroom discussion, however, is a difficult task for teachers. Instructing pre-service and in-service teachers explicitly about discussion, and the factors that influence discussion, could encourage its effective use in the classroom.

Those who do teach discussion. Teacher educators should recognize that teachers have multiple conceptions of classroom discussion, and that each conception serves a different educational purpose. Rather than focusing on teaching particular "types" of discussion, teacher educators might concentrate on the purposes that each serves. Perhaps one conception accomplishes a goal better than another.

Teacher educators should model how to lead discussion, thinking out loud with their students about the decisions being made during a discussion session. If teachers are going to use discussion, they need to understand how to lead it, and have evidence that it will work with students. Practice leading discussions seems important. Exploring various factors that influence discussion, and practicing ways to overcome them, could play an important part in preparing teachers to use classroom discussion. My sample of teachers used discussion frequently, but they were also

experienced teachers, having led many discussions in many settings.

Future Research

The conceptions presented in this study need to be examined in light of additional rounds of data collection. As is the nature of grounded theory research, companion studies, with increasingly diverse samples, are needed. This new data might prompt the revision of the categories presented in this study: adding to them, refining them, and elaborating them.

A second implication for future research is the need to look for similarities and discrepancies between teachers' conceptions of discussion and their actual use of discussion in the classroom. If any appear, then researchers can examine why teacher thinking and teacher practice are different.

A third implication for research pertains to student diversity and its influence on discussion and student participation. The teachers in my sample described ways that gender and student ability influenced discussion. Student differences other than these exist, and they likely influence discussion as well. For example, interactions among students of different races or ethnicities may affect classroom discussions. Teachers need to be asked directly if and how classroom discussions are affected when students differ in

areas such as race, culture, or socioeconomic levels. Their responses might allow for a better understanding of potential factors that influence their use of discussion, and may provide insight into ways teachers might encourage more student participation, even when outside influences make discussion difficult.

Future research would not necessarily need to gather additional data, for more work can be done with the data gathered in the present study. Below, I describe two studies that further theorize from the existing data. These studies would extend the present findings and develop a more formal theory of teachers' conceptions of discussion.

Connections between teacher differences and conceptions. One study could examine how specific differences among these six teachers are related to particular conceptions of discussion. For example, how might teaching in an urban setting affect teachers' conceptions of discussion? How does being a special education teacher affect conceptions, as opposed to being an advanced placement teacher? Teachers' individual conceptions and beliefs are probably influenced by their particular educational context or setting, as well as their own background, and experiences. Analyzing the data to identify how teacher differences are connected to different conceptions of discussion could clarify influences acting on teachers.

Differences in the sample set of teachers were used to

insure the generation of encompassing categories. These same differences could be used in a subsequent analysis to more fully explore the impact of factors such as teacher background, teaching experience, course content, students, and school setting.

Connections between conceptions and influencing factors. A second study could theorize about possible connections between the six conceptions of discussion and the five factors that influence the use of these conceptions. In the dissertation, data were analyzed to generate a set of factors that influence teachers' use of discussion. Theorizing further, how are these related? For example, teachers reported that student maturity influenced their conception of discussion: with immature students, teachers directed and controlled the discussion more than with students they believed were more mature. Another example concerns gender: teachers perceived girls as being more inhibited to talk than boys, and that boys needed to be taught to listen to the girls' comments more. Examining how the influencing factors and the conceptions are related should help extend the theory that was only begun here. In the next section, I try to foreshadow this kind of analysis.

Further Theorizing About Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion

Further analysis of the existing data could lead to connections among the six conceptions of discussion described

in Chapter Four. Here I suggest how these conceptions might be related to one another. When theorizing about their relationships, the factors influencing the uses of discussion also need to be considered. I present this as an example of how the conceptions of discussion might benefit from further analyses. This process is the very nature of generating theory. As Glaser & Strauss (1967) write: "When generation of theory is the aim...one is constantly alert to emergent perspectives that will change and help develop...theory... The published word is not the final one, but only a pause in the never-ending process of generating theory" (p. 40).

Teachers' conceptions of discussion are based in part on what they hope to accomplish during a lesson. Each conception of discussion becomes more or less viable as a method of instruction in relation to teachers' purpose. During the interviews, I asked teachers to describe purposes for using discussion in the classroom.[24] Theorizing further, I might integrate the conceptions of discussion around this dimension of "purposes." While each of the six conceptions of discussion has distinct characteristics, teachers believe some conceptions serve educational purposes that are similar to one another. Below, I suggest three ways the teachers' conceptions of discussion might be connected to one another around "purposes:" controlling students and

[24]This was the fourth research question of the study, and the fourth interview prompt.

course content, providing subject matter to students, and encouraging civic discourse and democratic citizenship education.

1. Teachers might conceive of discussion in different ways according to the amount of control they desire to exert over the subject matter and students. To some extent, teachers control all types of discussion, because they decide when to initiate the classroom talk. The nature of their interactions with students after this initiation, however, determines the amount of control a teacher has over a discussion. When enacting a recitation, teacher-directed conversation, or posing a challenging question, the teacher participates in almost every interaction, and is in a position to highly control the students and the nature of the classroom talk. When teachers want to control the discussion at all times, they think of discussion as a way to be highly visible during the interactions. While teachers may want control over discussions for many reasons, three primary reasons emerged from the data: 1) a concern about managing student behavior, 2) a desire to cover a predetermined amount of information in a specific amount of time, and 3) an uneasiness about students' ability to engage in a discussion. Teachers overcome these concerns by exerting control over the verbal interactions.

Teachers' conceptions of discussion shifts when they do not desire a high level of control. Three conceptions of

discussion involve teachers less in the interactions: guided transfers of knowledge, open-ended conversations, and practice at verbal interactions. Teachers choose to be less-controlling during these types of discussion because they want to give students more freedom and control over their verbal interactions. For example, teachers report that the content of discussions, and the comments made during discussions, are determined jointly by students and teacher. Teachers are willing to allow a discussion to progress without always offering input or ideas. In essence, teachers think of these discussions as opportunities to relinquish some control to students.

It is important to note that teachers do not *lose* control, but willingly give it to students. By doing so, they try to give students a greater sense of "freedom to explore ideas."[25]

The six conceptions of discussion are listed below, with the amount of teacher control given in parentheses after each conception:

Recitation (high control)

Teacher-directed conversation (high/moderate control)

Posing challenging questions (high/moderate control)

Guided transfer of knowledge (moderate control)

Open-ended conversation (moderate/low control)

[25]This is a quotation from Bill, and is representative of comments by Marie, Jane, and Linda as well.

Practice at verbal interaction (moderate/low control).

Recitation is the only conception that is always "highly controlled." All of the other conceptions require teachers to relinquish some of their control over subject matter and students.

2. When teachers plan to transmit specific information to their students, they conceive of discussion differently than when they allow students to construct their own understanding. Two types of discussion, recitation and teacher-directed conversation, are used when teachers transmit specific facts and information to their students. During these discussions, teachers want their students to recall the specific information that was given to them. While the characteristics of these two conceptions are different, they both allow for knowledge transmission. During both, teachers assume an active role in the interactions. For example, they often present specific information and details, and then direct the students toward a specific point or understanding.

If the purpose of a discussion is to encourage knowledge construction, discussion is conceptualized differently. When knowing facts is important but not sufficient, teachers want classroom discussions to go beyond transmitting information. Two conceptions of discussion encourage students to construct their own understanding: discussion as challenging questions and discussion as open-ended conversations. Teachers believe

the process of discussing encourages students to use higher-level thinking skills. By posing challenging questions and using open-ended conversations, teachers are able to challenge students' current understanding of a topic, and assess what sorts of understandings students are developing. Both of these conceptions emphasize the development of student understanding during class interactions. The discussions become a process during which students construct knowledge.[26]

A fifth conception, discussion as guided transfer of knowledge, falls between transmission and construction. Discussion is initially thought of as a way for specific information to be transmitted to students from the teacher, textbook, or other students. As with the knowledge construction conceptions, however, guided transfer allows students to develop their own understanding during the discussions, after the information is transmitted.

When exploring teachers' conceptions of discussion along the lines of constructivism and transmission, one conception is left out: discussion as practice at verbal interaction. Subject matter is not the focus of this type of discussion. If, however, developing "skill at discussion" is considered

[26]Similar to this purpose is Engle and Ochoa's (1988) suggestion that discussion, when combined with probing, open-ended questions, requires students to organize available information for the purpose of arriving at their own defensible answers. They recommend the use of questions to stimulate student thinking and guide classroom discussions.

to be part of course content, then this conception is closer to the knowledge construction end of the continuum. Students will better understand how to discuss, and what it means to discuss, as they interact during discussion.

I list the six conceptions of discussion below, ordered according to their use by teachers to either transmit information to students or allow knowledge construction:

Recitation (transmission)

Teacher-directed conversation (transmission)

Guided transfer of knowledge (transmission/construction)

Open-ended conversation (construction)

Posing challenging questions (construction)

Practice at verbal interaction (neither)

3. When teachers want to use classroom discussion to give students experience engaging in civic discourse as democratic citizens, they conceptualize discussions with particular characteristics. Teachers described four conceptions of discussion relative to civic discourse and democratic citizenship education: discussion as open-ended conversations, teacher-directed conversations, guided transfer of knowledge, and practice at verbal interaction. Teachers believe these four conceptions of discussion serve the purpose of developing students' abilities to engage in the type of talk needed in a democratic society. Five descriptors emerged from the data as to the democratic citizenship abilities that teachers believe these four kinds

of discussion develop: 1) talking with other citizens about important public issues; 2) developing social skills that allow students to question and persuade one another with a high degree of civility; 3) exploring possible ways to be involved in civic activities; 4) learning how to cooperate and compromise with others; and 5) making group decisions on an issue. The teacher's involvement in the interactions are different during each of the four conceptions. However, each provides opportunities for students to question and interact verbally with one another.

The two remaining conceptions, discussion as recitation and posing challenging questions, do not directly serve the purpose of teaching students about engaging in public talk as democratic citizens. When teachers think of enacting a recitation and posing challenging questions, their focus is more on student recall and understanding. These discussions may be used as a "change of pace" after a lecture, or, as mentioned in the previous section, to encourage students to better understand the topic being discussed. Neither serves the explicit purpose of teaching students about the abilities needed to engage in discussions as democratic citizens.

Below I list the four conceptions of discussion that are used to teach civic discourse.

Open-ended conversation

Teacher-directed conversation

Guided transfer of knowledge

Practice at verbal interaction.

In this section, I suggested three ways that the six conceptions of discussion might be related to one another around their purpose of instruction: teacher control of students and course content, providing subject matter to students, and encouraging civic discourse. This exemplifies a level of theorizing beyond the development of the conceptions of discussion. This is an initial theory only, of course. More theorizing is needed to fully understand the way teachers think about classroom discussion, and more data is needed to test these initial theories.

Summary

My purpose in this final chapter was to discuss the findings and the implications of this study. I explained that my findings made a significant contribution to previous research on discussion by revealing the complexity of teachers' conceptions of discussion, the influence that students have on discussion, and the importance of the teacher as discussion leader. I then examined five limitations that stemmed from the assumptions and methodology. Finally, I suggested implications of the findings for teachers, teacher educators, and for researchers who are interested in classroom discussion.

This dissertation built an initial layer of an explanatory theory of teachers' conceptions of discussion.

I collected data from in-depth interviews with six high school social studies teachers who used discussion. During the analysis of this data, six conceptions of discussion emerged from the data. Teachers thought of discussion as a recitation, a teacher-directed conversation, an open-ended conversation, a series of challenging questions, a guided transfer of knowledge, and as practice at verbal interaction. Five factors also emerged that seemed to influence teachers' use of these conceptions: student diversity, lesson objectives, age and maturity of students, sense of community in the classroom, and interest level of students.

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Appendix A

Matrix of Research Questions X Interview Questions & Think-aloud Activities

Research questions:	Interview Question #1	Interview Question #2	Interview Question #3	Interview Question #4	Think-aloud Activity 1	Think-aloud Activity 2
What are teachers' conceptions of discussions in high school social studies classes?	X	X	X	X	X	X
Do teachers have more than one conception of discussion?	X		X		X	
What characteristics do teachers consider typical of classroom discussions?	X	X		X	X	X
What purposes do teachers believe classroom discussions serve?		X	X	X		X
What factors seem to influence teachers' use of discussions?		X			X	X

Appendix B

Interview Questions

I posed similar questions, introductions, and explanations to each teacher (these are listed below in quotations). Questions One through Four are the questions for the interviews. During the interviews, follow up questions clarified the teachers' responses. Questions Five and Six are the prompts for the two think-aloud activities:

Question One: Definition/Image of Classroom Discussion:

Introduction: "I'll be talking to you about using discussion as a way to teach in your classroom. People think of discussion in a lot of different ways. I want to know what comes to mind when you think of using discussion in your classroom. I also know that you teach five different periods. If you plan discussions differently or the same for your different classes, that will be valuable for me to know as well."

"Think a bit about planning to use a discussion in your classroom. Imagine that you will lead a discussion with your students tomorrow. Describe the mental image that comes to mind when you hear the term discussion."

"Picture in your mind a discussion that you've had in your classroom. What pictures/thoughts come to mind. Anything else?"

"What are some characteristics of teachers during discussions? How about students?

"How do teachers and students interact during discussions?"

"How do students and students interact during discussions?"

Question Two: Descriptions of Ideal/Imperfect Discussions:

Introduction: "I want you to think of the ideal discussion. It can either be one you have experienced or one that you would imagine. What are some characteristics of the teacher during this discussion?"

"What are some characteristics of the students?"

- "Could you give me some examples?"

"Describe the atmosphere/setting of the classroom."

- "Could you give me some examples?"

"How do teacher and students interact during this discussion?"

- "Could you give me some examples?"

"How do students and students interact during this discussion?"

- "Could you give me some examples?"

"Do the students learn during this ideal discussion?"

- "Why?"

"What allows for this ideal discussion to ever occur?"

"What topics would be discussed?"

"Now I want you to think of a failed discussion...one that just did not work as you planned. Again, use details from actual experiences and from experiences you could imagine would happen."

"What are some characteristics of the teacher during this discussion?"

-"Could you give me some examples/Real ones you've seen?"

"What are some characteristics of the students?"

- "Could you give me some examples?"

"Describe the atmosphere/setting of the classroom."

- "Could you give me some examples/Real ones you've seen?"

"How do teacher and students interact during this discussion?"

- "Could you give me some examples/Real ones you've seen?"

"How do students and students interact during this discussion?"

- "Could you give me some examples/Real ones you've seen?"

"Do the students learn during an imperfect/failed discussion? Why?"

- "Could you give me some examples/Real ones you've seen?"

"What causes a discussion to fail?"

"What makes something difficult to discuss?"

- "Could you give me some examples/Real ones you've seen?"

Question Three: List of "Discussion Activities."

This Question has two parts. During Part I, the teachers will make a list on a sheet of paper. During Part II, they will examine and explain the list, item by item.

Part I:

Introduction: "Now, I would like you to think of all the activities that happen in a classroom. What type of activities could be thought of as discussion?"

"Think of as many activities as possible, and write them down on this paper."

Part II:

"Tell me about this first (second, third, fourth,...) item. What about it makes it a discussion?"

"How often would you think of this activity as a

discussion?"

"Tell me what the teacher's/students' roles are during this activity."

"When would you use this type of activity?"

Question Four: Educational Purposes of Discussion:

As with Question three, this Question has two parts. During Part I, the teachers will make a list. During Part II, they will examine and explain the list, item by item.

Part I:

Introduction: "I would like you to think how discussion helps you as a teacher. Think how discussion helps students learn."

"Now, I would like to know what purposes discussion serves...why would you use discussion in the classroom? As we did before, please write down as many purposes that you can think of on this paper."

Part II:

"Tell me about this first (second, third, fourth,...) purpose. Why is this purpose valuable?"

"How is this purpose educationally valuable?"

"How often would you think discussion serves this purpose?"

"How important is this purpose to you as a teacher?"

"How important is it for your students to learn this?"

Question Five: Vignettes of Different Types of Discussions:

Introduction: "You will do a sorting exercise. You will also be thinking out loud for me as you do this exercise. To help understand the procedure of thinking out loud, read the following paper: Thinking Out Loud -- General Instructions" (practice and demonstrate with an example when finished).

> Thinking Out Loud -- General Instructions
> I am interested in how you think about the interactions that take place during a classroom discussion. As you are completing this activity, please tell me everything you are thinking as you are thinking. Here are five guidelines to remember as we do this exercise:
>
> 1) Say whatever is on your mind. Do not hold back. I am interested in everything you say and think.
> 2) Speak as continuously as possible. Say something at least every 5 seconds. I will prompt you if needed.
> 3) Speak audibly. Watch out for your voice dropping as you start thinking and concentrating more.
> 4) Don't worry about speaking in complete sentences. Do not worry about eloquence.
> 5) Say what you are thinking. Talk as you think. Don't store your ideas or thoughts for very long.
>
> Do you have any questions? (Johnson, 1992)

When they finish reading and practicing, I said: "I have written out five vignettes of teachers instructing a class. Order these as "most" like a discussion in your classroom to "least" like a discussion? As you consider the order, please think out loud. Please say anything that comes to mind when you are ordering them."

"I will watch you order these cards...if you stop talking, I will prompt you to tell me what you are thinking. Otherwise I will remain quiet during this activity."

Question Six: Think aloud while drawing discussion interactions:

Introduction: "Please diagram the interactions among students and teacher during two discussions. First, I'll have you diagram interactions during an ideal discussion. Second, I'll have you diagram interactions during a discussion that did not work the way you wanted." (At this point, the teacher was given a blank seating chart of their classroom).

"This is a seating chart of your room. During a discussion, where would you stand?" (the teacher marked on the chart where they stand -- this way I did not tell them where to stand, but allowed them to tell me).

"Now, imagine that you were watching yourself and your class during a discussion. If the lines drawn by the pencil represent interactions that would occur among the students and you, how would it look on this paper?" (I demonstrated

examples of how to draw a teacher's interaction with a student, a student's interaction with a teacher, and a student's interaction with another student. I prompted whenever a line was made without an explanation, or if I did not understand what the teacher was saying. If the teacher said, for example, "I will stand in the front of the room, unless it is with fifth period," then I followed up with a question about the uniqueness of fifth period).

Appendix C

Classroom Discussion Vignettes

I developed the five vignettes to present a range of possible classroom behaviors. The vignettes incorporate two theories of using discussion in the classroom: Bridges' (1987) three conditions for discussion and Roby's (1988) five models of discussion (these were explained in Chapter Two under "Guidelines of Discussion."

The five vignettes offer a continuum of possible discussions in the classroom. At one end of the continuum instruction is text or teacher centered; the teacher is the holder of predetermined answers to questions. At the opposite end, instruction is student-centered, with everyone having their own right answer. Arguing over whose opinion is right predominates the class. Neither of these two vignettes incorporate the required conditions suggested by Bridges (1987). Between these two are three other vignettes. Each the these three vignettes follow Roby's (1988) model, but are contextualized to contain one or all of the conditions necessary for a discussion. In one, teachers and students pursue a satisfying answer that was not predetermined beforehand. In another, the students and teacher challenge opinions by examining them for factual bases and elements of truth. The eventual outcome is the resolution of opposing opinions. In the final vignette, students and teacher raise questions that will help inform their decisions. Students share information that they bring to the discussion from

previous thinking and experience.

Each of these vignettes states differing amounts of student and teacher involvement. As they sorted them, the teachers were encouraged to combine parts of one vignette with another to create a discussion that is representative to them.

Five Discussion Vignettes:

1. Jim. Jim's students have just finished reading an eight page section of their history text. Jim plans to discuss with his students a series of questions that he has written about information contained in the textbook. By listening to the students' answers, he plans to get a very "general" idea of what they remember. His questions are given to anyone in class. Sometimes he calls on students, but at other times he allows them to answer without raising their hands. When a right answer is given, Jim moves to the next question. When a wrong answer is given, he probes the student's response, or he calls on a classmate, until the right answer is given. Occasionally no one can get the right answer and he has to refer his students to the page in the book where the answer can be found. Jim uses discussion to evaluate student knowledge and to review information they have received in class.

2. Kerry. Kerry uses discussion to help solve problems that she presents to the class. Kerry does not have a predetermined answer that she hopes the students will discover through the discussion. She finds a problem that she thinks will make her students think, or at least that will puzzle them. The discussion helps clarify the problem, and ultimately assists the class find a solution to the problem. Her role during the discussion is to give the students information that they had not thought about -- more details, different perspectives of the problem -- in order to puzzle them. By discussing the problem, the students help each other understand the problem, clarify ideas, and eventually come to a consensus about the problem. Kerry does not see herself as the holder of information for the students to tap into. She sees herself as the person who challenges the students' comments to insure that they are making sense. She uses discussion so students can encourage each other and learn from each other as they solve a problem or a puzzle.

3. Jack. Jack uses discussion to bring out facts about opposing opinions. His students' opinions and comments are evaluated by the class for their factual bases. Through discussion, his students connect facts and information that

they have learned to a certain topic or context. When they need more information, they either continue to discuss their ideas to make them more clear, or research more information to support their opinions. Conflicts and disagreements are resolved by examining the truthful elements of each opinion and combining truthful and factual details with others. Opinions and thoughts during the discussion are scrutinized for facts that can be supported with details other than the person's opinion. Jack does not want to say an opinion is "right" or "wrong", but wants to discuss with his students the opinions presented, and examine them for their content. He wants students to inquire about facts and learn information so they can use it in the discussion. He feels that discussing their opinions will encourage them to build a better understanding of what they do and do not know.

4. Chris. Discussions in Chris' class are used to examine what information students have about a topic, and raise questions about what the students do not know. Chris is able to use what the students have learned in other settings, and gathers many different points and comments from the students. Opinions, facts, and knowledge the student brings to class are all used to broaden perspectives about a topic. The teacher also presents information, and models how to think critically. Comments from students are accepted as they build a general base of knowledge about a topic. In many ways, Chris plays "Devil's Advocate" because she questions ideas in order to expose what is not known, and what is needed to help clarify and help understanding. Comments made during the discussion are not right or wrong. Chris encourages comments that add information to the topic being discussed. Chris likes to use discussion because it allows all students to voice their opinions about an issue or topic. She does not want to give all the information to her students. Instead she relies on discussion to provide opportunities for her students to help each other increase the amount of information they have.

5. Brian. Brian wants his students to participate in discussions, and chooses not to direct them very much. If a student expresses an opinion, other students are free to challenge and question that opinion. Arguments are part of these discussions, but courtesy is demanded. Brian is never exactly sure where the discussions will lead, and often allows them to be directed by the students. The ground rules of discussion are that everyone is entitled to express their own opinion, and there is little emphasis on what the right answer or better answer may be. Students often leave class having had a heated argument or debate. The important part of these discussions is not that the students come to a consensus about the topic, but that they have a forum to present their thoughts and opinions. Each student approaches a problem from

their own perspective. Discussion is a way that these perspectives, and opinions, can be presented for consideration by the class. Brian believes that these types of debates/discussions will encourage learning.

Appendix D
Consent Form

University of Washington
College of Education
Consent Form

Social Studies Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion

Investigator: Bruce Larson; Graduate Student: Area of Curriculum and Instruction

This project is a research activity that is designed to show different ways teachers conceptualize discussion as a tool of instruction. I am interested in the ways discussion is conceptualized by social studies teachers.

I will interview you to get a sense of your conceptions of classroom discussion. To promote accuracy, these interviews may be taped. If they are, you will have the opportunity to review and clarify or delete any points on the tape immediately following the interviews. Strict confidentiality will be maintained as to the content of interviews. You may withdraw from participation in this research at any time without penalty. Your name, and the district name, will be changed in any written reports. Notes will be taken during the interviews about the questions/prompts I present and the responses you provide. From the interviews I hope to get a sense of how teachers conceptualize discussion as a tool for instruction. No evaluation of your teaching, content covered, the students, or any other aspect of the school setting will occur. All findings will be kept in strict confidence, and will be available to you at the completion of the study. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. Thank you in advance for your help in this project!

_____
Bruce E. Larson/Date

"The study described above has been explained to me. I voluntarily consent to participate in this activity. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand the future questions I may have about the research or about my rights as a subject will be answered by the investigator listed above."

_____
Signature/Date

cc:
Participant
Bruce E. Larson

Appendix E

Conceptions of Discussion X Teacher

Each of the six conceptions of discussion emerged in most of the participants' responses. Only two of the conceptions, recitation and guided transfer of knowledge, were not described by all of the sample. Below is a matrix that shows the conceptions held by each teacher.

	Alex	*Bill*	*Cathy*	*Deborah*	*Elaine*	*Frank*
Recitation	X		X	X	X	
Teacher-directed Conversation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Open-ended Conversation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Posing Challenging Questions	X	X	X	X	X	X
Guided Transfer of Knowledge	X	X	X		X	
Practice at Verbal Interaction	X	X	X	X	X	X

VITAE

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EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON Seattle, WA	Ph.D. (October, 1991 - Present) Major area of study: Secondary Curriculum/Instruction Specializations: Social Studies Curriculum Teacher Education Cultural Anthropology Educational Psychology
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON Seattle, WA	M.Ed. - August, 1991 Educational Psychology Specialization: Human Development and Cognition.
PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY Tacoma, WA	B.A.E. - December, 1984--Cum Laude Major areas of study: Physical Ed./Social Studies Washington Standard Teaching Certificate: K-12
SEATTLE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY Seattle, WA	Attended September 1980 - June 1981

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY TEACHER University of Puget Sound Tacoma, WA (Summer 1994)	Developed and taught the course, Curriculum Development (EDUC 608), to in-service teachers in a M.Ed. (post-certification) program. The course was designed to engage teachers in developing an overall understanding of the nature of curriculum. It examined various theoretical and philosophical orientations, approaches, and procedures for developing and implementing curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels.

TEACHING ASSISTANT
University of Washington
Seattle, WA
Supervisor: Walter Parker
(Jan 1995-June 1995)

Assisted in a secondary social studies methods course in a Master's degree program leading to teacher certification. The course was designed to prepare pre-service teachers to instruct one or more of the courses taught in the social studies (e.g., U.S. and world history, geography, government/civics, Washington state studies, economics, sociology, psychology). Responsibilities included: classroom instruction, individual student advising and tutoring, student-teaching assistance, student evaluation.

FACULTY INTERNSHIP
University of Washington
Seattle, WA
Supervisor: Walter Parker
(Mar 1994-June 1994)

Assisted the instruction of a secondary social studies methods course in a program leading to teacher certification. The course was designed to prepare pre-service teachers to teach social studies courses with an issue-centered approach. The course provided pre-service teachers with skills for developing higher-level thinking and critical thinking skills about perennial social studies issues in their students. A Faculty Intern works closely with the head professor and teaching assistant during the development, implementation, and evaluation phases of the course.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT
University of Washington
Seattle, WA
Supervisor: Nathalie Gehrke
(Oct 1991-June 1992)

Worked with the Puget Sound Professional Development Center providing professional development for in-service and pre-service teachers. Specific responsibilities involved developing opportunities for curriculum and instruction collaboration between the University of Washington and four local middle schools. Also assisted in the implementation of a computer networking and E-mail system among the PDC schools.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT
University of Washington
Seattle, WA
Supervisor: Steven Kerr
(Oct 1990-August 1991)

Wrote high school math and science curriculum that integrated computer technology. Direct responsibilities included training teachers to use educational computer software packages, evaluating computer applications, and assisting in the development of an integrated science curriculum.

PUBLIC SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER
Jefferson High School
Federal Way, WA
(Sept 1986-June 1990;
Sept 1992-Present)

High School teacher in the following subjects: United States history, United States literature, World literature, Writing, and Health.

CURRICULUM LEADER Federal Way Schools (Sept 1992-June 1994)	Facilitated the development of an elementary social studies curriculum for the district. The curriculum emphasizes a thematic approach to learning social studies, and integrates many subject areas. The curriculum leaders were responsible for directing the writing of the course curriculum and the instructor's manual.
DEPARTMENT HEAD Jefferson High School Federal Way, WA (Sept 1986-June 1990)	Health Department Head. Coordinaterd department budget, programs, and curriculum development.

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

JOURNAL ARTICLE: (juried script, blind review)

Larson, B. E. & Parker, W. C. (in press). What is classroom discussion? A look at teachers' conceptions. Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, Winter, 1996.

CONFERENCE PAPER PRESENTATIONS:

Larson, B. E. & Gotchy, J. (1995, November). "T.H.A.L.I.A.: Teaching history and literature in America with groupwork, allegories, and academic rigor." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, Chicago.

Larson, B. E. & Gotchy, J. (1995, October). "Using cooperative learning groups and allegories to teach American literature and American history from 1950 to 1995." Paper and curriculum program presented at the annual meeting of the Washington State Council for the Social Studies, Woodinville, WA.

Larson, B. E. & Parker, W. C. (1994, April). "Teachers' conceptions of discussion." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Larson, B. E.(1993, November). "High school social studies teachers' conceptions of discussion." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies, Nashville.

Sagmiller, K., Larson, B., Smith, J., Ewbanks, W., Parsons, J., & Malott, A. (1993, April). "Electronic networking to facilitate professional development center goals: An evaluation of a collaborative science curriculum effort." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, Georgia.

Smith, J.P. & Larson, B.E. (1993, January). "K-12 teacher access to the Internet: A pilot project." Paper presented at the Northwest Council on Computer Education, Portland.

Larson, B. E. (1992, November). "Theme-centered discussion in current events: A multiple-case study." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies, Detroit.

Smith, J.P. & Larson, B.E. (1992, October). "K-12 teacher use of the Internet." Paper presented at the NorthWestNet Annual Meeting, Portland.

TECHNICAL REPORT:

Larson, B. E. (1992). "The Belief Academy: A field study" (Tech. Rep. No. 10). Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Center for the Study of Civic Intelligence.

UNIVERSITY PRESENTATIONS:

Larson, B. E. (1993, May). "A proposal: Examining high school social studies teachers' conceptions of discussion." Paper presented at the University of Washington, College of Education, Research and Inquiry Colloquium, Seattle.

Larson, B.E. (1993, February). "Democracy, contexts, and social studies education." Presentation at the University of Washington, College of Education, Master's Colloquium, Seattle.

Larson, B. E. (November, 1992). "Exploring theme-centered discussions: A multiple case study." Paper presented at the University of Washington, College of Education, Research and Inquiry Colloquium, Seattle.

MASTER'S THESIS:

Larson, B. E. (1991). Detection and correction of surface and meaning errors during the revision process. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.