CHAPTER 6

General discussion
**6.1 Introduction**

In the last decennia, research has demonstrated that classroom discussions around texts can enhance student development in several ways. Among others, they can improve all kinds of cognitive processes (such as text comprehension and problem solving), lead to better argumentation skills and create more engagement (Applebee et al., 2003; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Chinn et al., 2001; Gosen, 2012; Murphy et al., 2009; Reznitskaya et al., 2001). However, not every discussion around texts is equally successful in realising these benefits. For productive discussions, the teacher is to be a facilitator inviting students to take the floor and share their thoughts and experiences (Evans, 2001; Myhill, 2006; Van der Veen et al., 2015). Open-ended or authentic questions are often recommended as a means to do this, as these elicit longer contributions and can enhance student engagement (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Myhill, 2006; Nystrand, 1997; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Furthermore, the use of (longer) silences and letting students respond directly to each other or elaborate on their previous turn are mentioned in order to realise a discussion framework and extend and support the students’ learning and understanding (Cazden, 1988; Chinn et al., 2000; Dillon, 1985; Michaels & O’Connor, 2015; Myhill, 2006; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Soter et al., 2008).

As these suggestions and recommendations from the literature are still quite vague and potentially ambiguous, the aim of this thesis was to further analyse teacher conduct facilitating whole-class discussions by looking at classroom interaction in great detail. In order to be able to perform this analysis, 39 history and geography lessons in four different primary school classrooms in the Netherlands were organized as whole-class discussions. These discussions were centred around discussable questions: questions that do not have one indisputable answer but rather challenge students to come up with arguments and solutions over the course of a lesson (Tammes et al., 2015; cf. ‘big questions’ Reznitskaya et al., 2001). Teachers were instructed on the basis of the general recommendations reported in the literature. All lessons were video-recorded and analysed by means of Conversation Analysis. This method is particularly suitable for detailed analysis of interaction as it not only considers one participant’s utterances, but also the understanding of these utterances by the other participants as reflected in their responses. By looking at the teacher conduct in great detail, we gained new insights into the interactional workings of (different practices for) their actions during whole-class discussions. This reveals which types of teacher conduct foster a discussion framework and provide the students with the opportunity to produce longer stretches of talk and reason together.

The current chapter provides a summary of the studies within this thesis. Subsequently, conclusions are drawn on the basis of the findings. Finally, implications and opportunities for future research as well as recommendations for practice are discussed.
6.2 Summary & conclusion

The general introduction (Chapter 1) provides the theoretical background, data, method and outline of the thesis. Chapters 2-5 report on the four conversation analytic collection studies conducted in this project. The studies analyse the different characteristics of quality classroom discussions around texts as described by the literature. These characteristics include the teacher asking open-ended or authentic questions, letting students elaborate their turns and respond to each other and, more generally, taking on a facilitating role so that students take the floor for extended periods of time. In the successive chapters, these different types of conduct are scrutinised.

6.2.1 Teachers’ open invitations in whole-class discussions

Chapter 2 untangles the notion of ‘open-ended or authentic questions’. In contrast to known-information questions (questions with a predetermined answer already known to the teacher, Mehan, 1979b), these questions “convey the teachers’ interest in students’ opinions and thoughts” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 7) and provide students with the opportunity to share these personal views (Myhill, 2006; Nystrand, 1997; Soter et al., 2008). In this way, open-ended questions can stimulate discussions containing high-level thinking, reasoning and elaborated explanations (Soter et al., 2008; see also Chinn et al., 2001). The study reported in Chapter 2 provides a closer insight into such questions in order to specify their characteristics other than “appear[ing] to have no single correct answer and allow[ing] students leeway to answer in a number of different ways” (Chinn et al., 2001, p. 394). The study focuses on open-ended questions produced by teachers after reading a piece of text, thereby opening the floor for discussion. It distinguishes between different types of these questions and identifies the responses these different types elicit. As these ‘questions’ do not always take the grammatical form of a question, we called them ‘open invitations’.

The analysis reveals that open invitations are not a uniform category. Open invitations take different shapes and moreover vary in openness. Four different types of open invitations were identified. The first category comprises invitations projecting (a series of) objectively true or false answers. This makes them very similar to known-information questions, but with the difference that the teachers do not treat these questions as having one predetermined correct answer. The second type of open invitations is the invitation that projects specific response types. This means that these invitations make a specific type of response relevant, for example the sharing of an opinion. The third type does not project such a specific response type, but does exhibit a restricted referent: students are prompted to say something about a particular part of the text (or image). The fourth and final type of open invitations
constitutes topic soliciting invitations, providing the students the space to freely produce a contribution and share whatever they want.

These four types of open invitations show that the notion of “open-ended or authentic questions” is still a quite general notion that can be further specified. Some of the invitations demonstrate a relatively strong projection, whereas others hand over control to the students and invite their own initiative. The latter type is so open that students sometimes express their uncertainty about what to contribute with. In general, however, all open invitations lead to fitted student responses. Following the less open invitations, students typically produce series of parallel responses, whereas the more open invitations lead to discussions or the collaborative answering of clarification questions.

6.2.2 Asking for more: teachers’ invitations for elaboration in whole-class discussions

Productive discussions around texts are characterised by students taking the floor for extended periods of time, a high degree of uptake of prior contributions and students’ elaborated explanations (see Webb, 1991; Soter et al., 2008). Such elaborations challenge students to verbalise and explain their thinking, thereby increasing their understanding and helping them to develop new perspectives (Avery et al., 2013; Bargh & Schul, 1980; Chinn et al., 2000; Webb, 1992; Webb et al., 2002). It is therefore important that students are encouraged to produce longer turns than they typically do in response to known-information questions (Damhuis et al., 2004; Mehan, 1979a; Soter et al., 2008) and that they are invited to provide explanations and elaborations in order to restructure and share their thinking (Ross, 2008; Webb, 1992). Chapter 3 provides a scrutiny of the way in which teachers invite students to elaborate on their own preceding turns. The study distinguishes between different types of invitations for elaboration (IfEs) based on their format and projection. Moreover, it identifies the types of student contributions that prompt the invitations and the student responses these invitations result in.

The analysis demonstrates that teachers’ invitations for elaboration occur in different places: they are prompted by elicited as well as spontaneous student turns. Furthermore, the invitations for elaboration can be divided into subcategories based on the type of elaboration they solicit from the students. The majority of invitations for elaboration solicit an account and typically follow a student’s contribution of a subjective nature. Most of these invitations seem to be prompted by the ‘bareness’ of these assertions, while others do not follow a ‘bare’ assessment and seem to be aimed at deepening the students’ contributions. Another type of invitations for elaboration solicits the production of an explanation and typically follows student contributions
of a more factual nature. Some of these invitations target an explanation of the previous turn, while others target an explanation on the basis of the previous turn, e.g. a specification. Finally, only twice in the data the invitations for elaboration simply solicit a continuation. Hence, these invitations do not steer towards a specific type of response, but give the students the opportunity to continue their previous turn more or less incrementally. Both of these invitations follow a spontaneous student contribution.

The findings show that the invitations for elaboration are prompted by different contexts and furthermore project different student responses. While all invitations provide students with the space to expand on their previous turn, most do nevertheless steer towards a specific type of response: an account or an explanation. The incidental IfEs that simply project continuation give the students most freedom to elaborate their previous turn as they wish. Where earlier research has stressed that teachers should encourage students to produce longer turns, this study demonstrates how they do this and invite their students to elaborate their turns. Furthermore, the study reveals that all types of invitations for elaboration typically lead to responses fitted to the projection in the invitation. Hence, the invitations indeed lead students to verbalising and explaining their thinking.

6.2.3 Teachers’ pass-on practices in whole-class discussions: how teachers return the floor to their students

The literature on classroom discussions suggests a framework in which the teacher does not take every other turn at talk, but gives the floor to the students for extended periods of time and lets them respond directly to each other (Cazden, 1988; Soter et al., 2008). This means a shift from the Teacher-Student-Teacher-Student turn-taking pattern omnipresent in teacher-fronted classroom interaction to a pattern that reflects the multiparty character of a whole-class discussion: T-S-S-S (Cazden, 1988; Chinn et al., 2001; Myhill, 2006). Chapter 4 provides insight into a specific means through which teachers attempt to realise this pattern and invite their students to respond to each other: the pass-on turn. Teachers’ pass-on turns occur after a student’s contribution and convey to the other students that they are encouraged to take the next turn and respond to the previous student. Remarkably, the teachers thus do occupy the response ‘slot’, but only to make it available to the students. The teachers thereby hold on to the T-S-T-S pattern, while aiming for the T-S-S-S pattern. The study in Chapter 4 identifies different pass-on practices and analyses the projection and consequences of these different practices on the ensuing student contributions.

The bottom-up analyses of the pass-on turns demonstrate that teachers use a wide variety of practices to return the floor to the students, often combined with
bodily conduct. They differ from each other with regard to the extent to which they preserve the sequential implications of the preceding student turn. Fairly minimal practices, such as purely bodily conduct, (partial) repetitions and imperatives such as ‘respond’ leave the projection in the student’s turn intact and accordingly typically lead to responses to the preceding student turn. Other often more elaborate pass-on practices slightly alter the sequential implications, for example by reformulating a student’s assertion as a question. As a result, these turns mostly lead to responses to the pass-on turn itself or to an earlier turn produced by the teacher, rather than to the preceding student turn. Following a student’s question, the type of pass-on practice seems to be of less influence on the ensuing student responses as the question itself powerfully projects an answer to the question as a next action.

The findings demonstrate that the format of the pass-on turn has an impact on the ensuing student responses with regard to the turn these contributions respond to. In the case of practices that preserve the sequential implications and lead to responses to the preceding student turn, one could say that although the turn-taking pattern still is (T-)S-T-S, the sequential pattern is (T-)S-S, as the pass-on practice only intervenes this sequence on the turn-allocation level. In this way, pass-on turns demonstrate teachers’ attempts to realise a discussion among the students, while simultaneously preserving their role of turn-allocator that is typical for teacher-fronted interaction (McHoul, 1978).

6.2.4 Gesture, gaze and laughter: teacher conduct facilitating whole-class discussions among students

In whole-class discussions, teachers are expected to take on a facilitating role and let students hold the floor for extended periods of time (Cazden, 1988; Myhill, 2006; Soter et al., 2008; Van der Veen et al., 2015). Previous research has shown that such a discussion framework can be installed by means of open-ended or authentic questions and the use of first assessments (Gosen et al., 2015; Myhill, 2006; Nystrand, 1997; Soter et al., 2008; Willemsen et al., 2018). Once students have taken the floor, teachers can provide opportunities for extending their talk by asking for elaborations of their own turns or responses to other students’ turns (Willemsen et al., 2019a, 2019b). Similarly, teachers can use bodily means to foster the discussion framework (Haldimann et al., 2017), but this has received little attention in research thus far. The same holds for the ways in which these discussion framework interactions come to an end (but see Gosen et al., 2015). Chapter 5 seeks to fill these gaps and therefore does not start out from a collection of specific teacher conduct, but instead from a collection of episodes in which students take several subsequent turns. The study systematically scrutinises
the teachers’ conduct around these episodes of discussion among the students and uncovers their facilitating repertoire.

The analyses point out that teachers’ facilitating conduct around episodes of discussion among the students is varied. Before the episodes, teachers initiate discussion by means of open invitations, pursuits, pass-on turns, invitations for elaboration and/or several types of bodily conduct such as gestures and lighthouse gazes (Björk-Willén & Cekaite, 2017). During the episodes, teachers certainly do not do nothing. Instead, they foster the discussion by gesturing and gazing, and even laughing around moments of overlap and drinking coffee around places relevant for turn transition. In this way, without taking a turn themselves, they invite students to take part in the interaction. The episodes come to an end in two ways: 1) the discussion ends naturally when the students no longer produce new contributions or when their discussion reverts to overlap and noise, 2) the teacher interrupts a student and produces his/her own turn. In both cases, the teacher typically brings back the focus or initiates an IRE-sequence. Sometimes however, in the case of natural endings, the teacher reinitiates the discussion.

The large repertoire of teacher conduct uncovered by this analysis, shows that the teachers’ facilitating role is performed in different ways, both before and during the episodes of discussion. Apart from leaving the floor to the students for extended periods of time, the teachers do hence exhibit quite some interactional work to accomplish the discussion framework. In some cases, the endings of the discussion episodes do also evidence the teachers’ facilitating role, as teachers sometimes use this moment to reinitiate the discussion framework and launch a new episode of subsequent student contributions. Starting from a collection of episodes of student discussion, the study not only identified teacher conduct already described in previous literature, but also discovered types of facilitating conduct that had not been characterised as such thus far. The analyses furthermore show that the students also orient to these types of conduct while participating in the discussion.

6.2.5 Conclusion

This thesis uncovers teachers’ facilitating conduct and its consequences for the interaction in whole-class discussion settings. It constitutes an important step towards answering the question of how whole-class discussions can be organised in such a way that students actually reason together and jointly construct knowledge. Especially discussions around texts can thereby enhance students’ engagement, their argumentative skills and most importantly their text comprehension, which is paramount to students’ knowledge and understanding of the world.
In the four studies within this thesis, the teacher conduct was analysed from two angles. On the one hand, analyses were conducted by collecting a number of prominent types of facilitating conduct from the data and scrutinising these types separately (Chapter 2-4). The last study, on the other hand, started out from the ‘student side’ by collecting episodes of subsequent student contributions (Chapter 5). From this latter collection, an inventory of facilitating teacher conduct around these episodes was made. Some of the conduct identified in this study constitutes the specific types that were analysed in the preceding studies. However, the study also uncovered conduct that might not have been in focus had our analysis not started out from series of student turns. This concerns among others the teachers’ laughing, drinking, nodding, gazing and gesturing: conduct that may not explicitly encourage a discussion framework, but nonetheless contributes to the teacher’s facilitating role. In this way, the analyses conducted within this PhD-project have created a rather complete picture on facilitating teacher conduct by looking at the interactions from both sides.

This picture demonstrates a large repertoire of conduct by means of which teachers facilitate and foster the discussion framework. Apart from the variety of actions that teachers employ as demonstrated in Chapter 5, these different actions themselves also exhibit much variation. As shown in Chapter 2-4, the teachers use various different practices for executing a particular action (opening the floor, inviting elaboration, passing on a turn). These nuances in the teachers’ turns also entail projection of different types of contributions in response. One type of open invitation, for example, gives the students considerable freedom, while the other clearly steers the student responses in a specific direction, regarding the referent and/or the type of response. The same holds for the teachers’ invitations for elaborations (IfEs) and pass-on turns: these turns can be produced through different practices with different projections that steer towards different types of student responses.

The studies have shown that students also orient to these nuances in the practices and projections of their teachers’ turns and typically produce fitted responses. Hence, by means of their practices, teachers exercise substantial influence on the unfolding interaction and on the degree to which the interaction follows a discussion-like framework. Some practices exert less control over the projected responses and thereby bring the discussion framework closer in the resulting interaction.

As the analyses have shown, the teacher conduct does not only constitute initiating actions; the teachers also build on the student contributions by inviting elaborations of and responses to these contributions to further explore the students’ thoughts and perspectives. Whereas in teacher-fronted interaction teachers typically take first and third positions, our data show a considerable number of instances in
which the teachers produce turns in second position: they do not only invite responses and elaborations after student contributions that were elicited by a teacher initiation (T-S-T-S), but also after spontaneously produced student contributions (S-T-S). In this way, the teachers retrospectively allow their students to take initiative and produce first turns by creating space to consider these spontaneous contributions in more detail in the ensuing interaction. Although Chapter 2 has shown how teachers take the first turn and open the floor after reading a piece of text, the other chapters have demonstrated that students sometimes also open the floor themselves by producing the first turn after reading without waiting for a (verbal) initiating action by the teacher.

The facilitating teacher role is also clearly manifested in the episodes of discussion in which teachers entirely refrain from making verbal contributions to foster the discussion and let their students respond to each other for extended periods of time. In these episodes, the students interact among themselves and the teacher does not intervene, but uses all kinds of bodily conduct that facilitates the discussion framework. In this way, the interaction can develop into more of an actual discussion in which the sequential positions of the turns are less apparent. In such episodes the teacher has clearly moved away from the role of turn-allocator and head of the interaction.

Such a discussion framework in which the students talk and respond to each other and in which the teacher takes on a more facilitating role is an important step towards creating opportunities for students to reason together and to jointly construct knowledge. By creating and facilitating this framework, teachers can eventually enhance students’ engagement, argumentation skills and text comprehension.

6.3 Discussion

Based on the findings of the studies reported in this thesis, the following sections will address the theoretical implications of the research, discuss opportunities for future research and provide recommendations for the educational practice.

6.3.1 Theoretical implications

This thesis has provided an analysis of teacher conduct facilitating whole-class discussions around texts, based on the recommendations formulated in the literature on such discussions. It has demonstrated that the recommended conduct and role of discussion facilitator have been described quite generally thus far and that there is a lot of nuance to be uncovered when analysing the different types of facilitating conduct in more detail. For example, one open invitation is much opener than the
other and in passing on a student’s turn, teachers can either preserve or alter the sequential implications which lead to different types of responses.

These kinds of nuances, following from the studies conducted in this thesis, stress the value of conversation analytic research: the method allows for a categorisation of utterances on the basis of how these utterances are understood and function in the interaction. The study in Chapter 2 provides a clear example of this. In the collection of open invitations, there were a number of invitations that could be considered known-information questions in the sense that the teacher presumably already knew the answer. Nonetheless, whereas such questions would probably have been labelled known-information questions in coding scheme research, this conversation analytic study demonstrated that these questions can also function as an open invitation to students and elicit multiple student responses and even arguments to underpin these responses. This shows that such questions are not always oriented to by the students as questions with one predetermined correct answer. Moreover, the teachers did not provide evaluations of the responses in the third turn, which is typical for IRE-sequences. Hence, possibly motivated by the context of the discussion setting, both students and teacher treated possible known-information questions as open invitations inviting multiple responses. It is important that these kinds of nuances as well as the different practices for certain actions get acknowledged in future research into teachers’ facilitating conduct in classroom discussions.

Apart from the characteristics of productive discussions already listed in previous literature, the research conducted within this thesis has also shed light on particular types of teacher conduct that received little attention thus far. By starting out the fourth study from the ‘student side’, several interesting types of teacher conduct came to the surface that together show the large repertoire of facilitating conduct employed before and during episodes of discussion among the students themselves. Moreover, the analysis has revealed bodily conduct as an important complementary means for facilitating a discussion framework. Although one might have already expected this in a setting in which teachers are instructed to give the floor to the students for extended periods of time (Soter et al., 2008), nonverbal and bodily conduct other than employing longer silences and using gaze (aversion) and gestures (Cazden, 1988; Damhuis et al., 2004; Dillon, 1985; Haldimann et al., 2017) had not been noted thus far.

Finally, this thesis has not only paid attention to the means for instigating and fostering discussions in the classroom. It has also regarded the ways in which discussion episodes come to an end. Although more research into these endings could reveal more about how the discussion episodes come to a close and how interactants retrospectively treat these episodes, this thesis has provided an important first step
towards the scrutiny of these episode endings by showing that students as well as teachers can cause the episodes to end and that the endings sometimes also constitute new beginnings.

6.3.2 Opportunities for future research

Together the four studies demonstrate a large and varied repertoire of facilitating teacher conduct. However, the analyses are not exhaustive: there are undoubtedly more types of facilitating conduct to be uncovered and some of the types that were identified still provide room for further scrutiny. For example, Chapter 5 has revealed an interesting phenomenon which can also be labelled as facilitating conduct and is certainly worthy of future research: in one of the extracts, the teacher produces an inviting utterance containing “I have no idea”. This phenomenon occurs rather frequently in the data and seems to stress the discussion framework in which student contributions are welcomed and in which the roles of the teacher and students are more symmetrical. In any case, the teacher ‘does’ not knowing and thereby explicitly deviates from known-information questions often posed in series of IRE-sequences in teacher-fronted interaction. Scrutiny of these expressions of unknowing stance (see also Gosen, Berenst, & De Glopper, 2013; Houen, Danby, Farrell, & Thorpe, 2018) and especially the epistemic stance taking by the students in their ensuing responses could inform us on whether and how these expressions influence the discussion framework.

Apart from the different types of conduct, the level of turn taking also provides interesting opportunities for future research. This thesis has demonstrated that teachers select next speakers in different ways. As Chapter 2 has shown, they select single students, but also pose open invitations to the whole group of students who are then to nominate or select themselves in order to become the next speaker. Similarly, the teachers sometimes only use bodily conduct and invite next speakers to select themselves by gesturing and/or looking around the classroom. In this way, apart from posing opener questions, the teachers also create more openness with regard to next speakership. This again seems to reflect their attempts to construct a discussion framework in which the teacher takes on a more facilitating role. A further investigation of the teachers’ selection of next speakers and the ways this is taken up by the students, could shed new light on the workings of the discussion framework from the turn-taking perspective.

At a higher level of analysis, future research on the changes between the different participation frameworks within the lessons could inform us on how and when these changes are made and what they mean for the interaction. For example, the analyses in Chapter 5 revealed that episodes of subsequent student contributions come to an
end in two ways. They either end ‘naturally’ as new contributions by the students are no longer forthcoming or as their discussion reverts to noise, or the discussion comes to an end because of an interruption produced by the teacher. Further scrutiny of these endings would provide insight as to when and how exactly teachers produce their interrupting turns and install an instructive framework. Moreover, this analysis could demonstrate the teachers’ judgement or interpretation of the episode of discussion they just brought to an end. Of course, the teachers’ occasional reinitiation of the discussion framework after an episode’s natural ending also provides information with regard to how the teacher has perceived it and how s/he wishes to continue. Hence, the discussion endings are a useful source for uncovering the discussion episodes’ perceived place and function in the interaction.

Following from this, it would be interesting to get a better grip on the teachers’ perception of their whole-class discussions and find out whether teachers consciously choose specific practices for their facilitating conduct and if so, how they come to these choices and whether they are content with the resulting interaction. Apart from their facilitating conduct, the teachers in the data also showed considerable amounts of conduct typical for more teacher-fronted types of classroom interaction: they frequently posed known-information questions, thereby allowing students only little room for their responses and placing themselves in first and third position (McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1979b). Here again, it would be interesting to find out to what extent these episodes of interaction characterised by a more instructive framework are intentionally brought about by the teachers. Did they use the instructional framework to transfer or prompt the discovery of specific information to their students? Or were they actually trying but failing to install a discussion framework? To gain more insight into these matters, the method of CA could be complemented with other methods of research, such as stimulated recall interviews (e.g. Calderhead, 1981) in which teachers can be asked such questions.

Other questions, for example how teachers come to such a large repertoire of facilitating conduct without being trained extensively beforehand, could also be answered by means of this kind of interviews and thereby complement the conversation analytic studies in this thesis. Possibly, the interviews could also disclose other types of conduct that teachers have in their repertoire and may use in the future, but have not shown in the lessons recorded for this research project. Furthermore, teachers could be asked whether they already employed such conduct before taking part in the research and if not, what impedes their use of this conduct in their everyday classroom interaction.

Next, the research in this thesis constitutes an important step towards uncovering how whole-class discussions around texts can lead to collaborative reasoning and knowledge construction by students. The four studies of this thesis
have focused on the teacher during whole-class discussions and have described a large repertoire of conduct by means of which the teachers facilitate and foster a discussion framework in which students produce longer stretches of talk and take the floor for longer periods of time (T-S-S-S). The student contributions have received less attention in the studies; they were mainly used to get an impression of the subsequent interaction after a specific teacher turn and to substantiate the analyses. However, as the focus of this thesis was motivated by the question of how students can be invited to have discussions with each other and to reason together, an extensive analysis of the shape and content of student conduct in this setting would only be logical. Conversation analytic research could uncover when and how the students engage in joint reasoning and build knowledge together. It could furthermore indicate the interactional surroundings in which joint reasoning takes place and the types and practices of teacher conduct that contribute to it.

Finally, the analyses in this thesis have demonstrated the normative relations at work in the particular setting of whole-class discussions in primary school history and geography lessons. The question is, of course, to what extent one can generalise from the context described in the research to other contexts. This is justifiable as long as one can reasonably assume that the normative relations also hold for these other contexts, as very different contexts may evoke teacher conduct that has different normative implications for the ensuing interaction. For example, when a whole-class discussion revolves around a different type of text such as a poem, the discussion will rather be about how the poem is experienced than about the students’ perception of presented facts. It may well be that teachers experience less pressure of knowledge transfer goals in these lessons and are therefore less inclined to steer the interaction towards a culturally appropriate interpretation of the text. This may lead them to perform different actions and could lead to other responses from the students as well. A similar shift might also be observed in lessons in which teachers philosophise with their students. It would be interesting to analyse whole-class discussions in these contexts and see what normative relations uphold and what relations change.

6.3.3 Recommendations for practice

From the findings in the four separate studies, it can be concluded that teachers use a large and varied repertoire of facilitating conduct during whole-class discussion lessons. This is remarkable given the fact that the teachers only received rather general instructions on the basis of previously conducted research. They did not receive suggestions on specific practices nor did they participate in an extensive preparatory training (c.f. Van der Veen, Van der Wilt, et al., 2017). Hence, it seems that providing teachers with recommendations from the literature and with the rationale behind these recommendations already steers them towards performing facilitating
behaviour. It must be noted here that the teachers in our data of course agreed to participate in the research and may therefore have been more inclined to instigate and foster the discussion framework than other teachers would. They were, however, not accustomed to having whole-class discussions with their students, but exhibited all kinds of facilitating conduct nonetheless.

In order to make (prospective) teachers consciously competent in their facilitating role during whole-class discussions, they could be trained by means of Conversation Analysis- and Discursive Psychology-based trainings such as the Conversation Analytic Role-Play Method (CARM, Stokoe, 2014) and the Discursive Action Method (DAM, Lamerichs & Te Molder, 2011). These trainings make the participants “analysts of their own discourse” (Lamerichs & Te Molder, 2011, p. 190) and do not instruct participants to perform certain actions, but rather make them aware of their own actions and practices. Regarding the findings of the studies within this thesis, such training could make (prospective) teachers conscious of the variety and nuances of their facilitating repertoire and its consequences for the ensuing interaction. Thereby, the training can help (prospective) teachers to employ (sub)types and practices suited to what they want to achieve in the interaction. For example, if one wants students to actually respond directly to each other, minimal pass-on practices are most suitable, whereas more elaborate pass-on practices can be used to slightly alter the preceding student contribution and steer the interaction towards responses to this reformulated version.

Training could also make (prospective) teachers aware of their bodily conduct facilitating the discussion. As Chapter 5 has evidenced, not only gestures and gaze have facilitating capacity. Other less obvious and less anticipated bodily means can also facilitate discussion. For example, the teachers’ bodily posture during the discussion can give a strong signal and taking a sip of coffee can be crucial to turn transition. In fact, the students’ behaviour has demonstrated that they repeatedly orient to the teacher and his or her conduct. Taking a first turn after reading, they do look at the teacher beforehand. Similarly, regarding the teacher’s drinking around places relevant for turn transition, we saw a student taking the next turn only after looking at her teacher taking a sip. This shows that everything the teacher does in these whole-class discussions seems of relevance to the interaction as it unfolds. Hence, facilitating the discussion is a constant activity, even when the teacher is (doing) listening to the students.

Apart from training, (prospective) teachers could also be informed on the outcomes of the studies within this thesis through contributions to professional education journals, teaching materials, and educational handbooks and through presentations at professional conferences. In this way, the ‘stocks of interactional knowledge’ (Peräkylä & Vehviläinen, 2003) that are held by the (prospective)
professionals in the educational field can be modified and complemented with the description of specific practices.

Notwithstanding the possibilities to make (prospective) teachers conscious of the variation and nuances in their facilitating conduct, the studies within this thesis have shown that relatively little instruction can already lead teachers to demonstrate all kinds of facilitating behaviour and thereby realise a framework in which teacher and students have a discussion about the texts just read. These whole-class discussion lessons are actually quite simple to organise: they can be based on the curricular texts and, as long as these texts offer room for overarching discussable questions such as “how do you think parents felt about their children going to school instead of working in factories?”, the approach can be applied. Moreover, whereas small-group discussions require organisation of group division, accommodation of these groups and parallel guidance by the teacher, whole-class discussions offer teachers the opportunity to more easily organise a discussion among the students and model thinking for the group as a whole (see for example McKeown & Beck, 1999).

In 36 out of 39 lessons recorded for this project, the students were placed in a circle formation. Such a formation seems most suitable for whole-class discussions, as it enables students to see each other and to readily identify who is presently speaking and who will probably be the next speaker on the basis of (self-) selection. In this way, the students can interact among themselves more easily and the teacher does not need to come between every two turns to allocate speakership. Hence, the circle formation also contributes to the teacher’s moving away from being the ‘head’ of the interaction (McHoul, 1978) and coming to a more symmetrical relationship with the students in this particular setting. In the lessons in the data set that did not take place in a circle formation, the students were seated in a small groups formation. Although this only concerns three lessons, the whole-class discussions in this formation seem to exhibit more turn-allocation by the teacher as well as more schisms in the interaction: students taking part in subgroup conversations. The lessons taking place in circle formation demonstrated a more central focus, which of course is preferable for whole-class discussions.

This thesis has contributed to a future in which teachers can consciously use different types and practices of facilitating conduct for whole-class discussions. Professionalization by means of training and presentations as well as the development of educational materials will help them employ conduct and practices suited to their goals in the interaction. In this way, teachers can realise discussion frameworks in which their students take the floor for extended periods of time and respond to each other’s contributions. Such productive discussions in which students reason together and jointly construct knowledge create more engagement among the students and enhance their argumentative skills as well as their text comprehension.