# Extracts from: Classroom Talk – Christine Edwards-Groves

# Chapter 4: : Talk practices for learning – focused teaching

## Dialogic Classroom Talk to Meet Current Learners’ Needs

### *The value of a particular kind of dialogic classroom talk is extolled here – not the kind of talk that simply feeds back information, but rather talk that has the power to shape knowledge through participant engagement with a range of processes: hypothesising, exploration, debate and synthesis. This kind of talk is the antithesis to ‘right answerism’ and facilitates learning which is active and which prepares young people for a complex world with many uncertainties and many occasions when rational choice is required.*

By scaffolding students' responses and contributions, teachers can quickly make a difference in the level of rigor and productivity in classroom talk.

Dialogic practice differs from the most frequent kind of talk found in classrooms, referred to here as monologic talk.

Monologic practices (Traditional classroom talk):

Overwhelmingly, the kind of talk found in classrooms is what is sometimes called ‘recitation talk’, where pre-eminence is given to transmission of knowledge by the teacher followed by some sort of evaluation or assessment. Wells (2001) referred to this type of teacher talk as ‘monologic’ where the teacher acts as the giver of knowledge and the student as the passive receiver. This talk takes the form of a monologue by the teacher where the talk is instigated by the teacher and is therefore one directional – it is from teacher to student and is typically controlled by questioning by the teacher. This has become known as IRE sequencing (Initiation by the teacher in the form of a question – Response or answer by the student – Evaluative comment by the teacher) or IRF sequencing (Initiation – Response – Follow-up). IRE/IRF was found to be the most common type of teacher talk in many classrooms in many countries and led Cazden (1988) to refer to the IRE/IRF sequence as the default option because she found that teachers always returned to it.

Dialogic practice

In contrast, dialogic talk is defined as an approach where both teachers and students make substantial and significant contributions to classroom talk and to learning in general. The conceptions of dialogic talk are enacted when:

• teachers and students share a joint inquiry where understandings are achieved through discussion and collaboration (Bruner, 1996)

• dialogue is mediated through open-ended and exploratory classroom activity (Wells, 1999)

• communication in the classroom is reciprocal between teachers and students and between student and student and involves exchanges of ideas (Mercer, 2000)

• talk is not only reciprocal but also collective (in group and whole class), cumulative (chaining of questions, answers and ideas) and supportive (Alexander, 2008a).

Both types of talk patterns are not mutually exclusive – as both have their value in classroom exchanges at particular times (for instance, presenting lectures, or giving instructions about organisation or the use of resources may be viewed as monologic) – each serves distinctly different purposes. The point is to consider what is it we want for students in the interaction, from the lesson?

Dialogic talk practices disrupt the default IRE sequence which mark many classroom exchanges by opening up a fourth turn for students – to extend their thinking, to clarify, to agree or disagree, to challenge or debate, to explain, to elaborate, to justify, to evaluate, or to self-correct. This facilitates a different kind of classroom talk in that it makes it possible for students to have longer, more extended turns of talk which enables more complex ideas to be articulated and explored. Changing this default pattern of talk requires conscious and strategic moves by the teacher if their aim is to achieve more participatory or dialogic practices and learning-focused responses. These practices are learnable.

## Purposes and principles for strategic meaning making

Dialogic pedagogies enable students to engage in talk with more substance; that is, talk which is robust and focused on deep learning, making meaning, reasoning and knowledge. By focusing on bringing students into a space where their meanings are extended, shared and negotiated, they are invited into a productive ‘meaning centred’ learning space. This means that the talk is not everyday conversation or informal but ‘on task’ and focused on deepening their understandings and substantive learning.

A hallmark of dialogic teaching practice therefore is its focal aim of deepening students’ understandings as they think about, enact (or go public) and evaluate meanings taken from the talk, the tasks and the texts with which they engage. What they understand, how they come to these understandings and how they justify them are evident in their talk (in their displays of comprehensibility). In this, teachers have access to the thinking, the knowledge and reasoning of their students; it is an opportunity for uncovering misunderstandings and misconceptions. From this, creating a space where meaning making is the cornerstone for learning requires creating conditions for an open, participatory and dialogic space through which the sayings, doings and relatings build inclusivity, capacity for thinking and talking and knowledge and understandings through reasoning and evidentiary talk.

## Dialogic pedagogies: A repertoire of practices

The following particular pedagogies of talk, described are deliberate and explicit talk moves, together form a repertoire of responsive dialogic pedagogies. They work in concert with each other to engage students in productive and substantive learning-focused conversations that reflect the conditions and principles detailed above. They are strategic, planned moves which open up the communicative space in the classroom.

These practices will be presented in the following section. As the transcripts show, the talk practices described are not mutually exclusive. In practice, as they happen, they often occur as overlapping and intertwined.

## 1.Sustaining the question

This dialogic practice invites students to offer a range of responses to a question and affords them extended talk time to deepen their thinking. They have the opportunity to share and then explore their own ideas further and to build onto or elaborate their own line of thought. In this approach, particular probes or provocations are used which ‘press for reasoning’ and provides the time for students to demonstrate a substantive engagement with the topic.

Teachers orchestrate talk moves, which enable students to engage in more substantive dialogue with the teacher and with the other students in the conversation. Rather than re-allocating each subsequent turn to a different student (as typical in many classroom exchanges), the talk sequence remains with the same student as a way to deepen the reasoning and engage students in sustained conversations about the given topic. It invites them to sustain their thinking about an idea, concept or opinion as they share ‘more complete’ ideas, then extend, elaborate and clarify their own thinking and responses.

What results is the chance for students to offer more coherent and cogent ideas or opinions and to extend these further by providing evidence to support their points or claims. As suggested previously, the place of evidentiary talk in classrooms makes the talk accountable to the learning community, to substantive reasoning as students show their understandings in their responses and to the knowledge being taken up in the lesson. Students, through this, develop responsibility for the community of learners in their classroom, for substantiating reasoning and for seeking out and expressing what is known in relation to the facts or evidence.

In this practice the teacher facilitates dialogue through productive questioning (using open-ended, critical, and inferential questions). These invite students to extend, elaborate on and deepen their own ideas before the floor is opened to the rest of the class. These also provide valuable time for students to rehearse ideas publicly, which can aid the development of written texts.

**Some examples of productive questioning:**

What else do we know about this topic?

How does the idea connect to another book we have read?

How do the ideas connect to another topic we have covered before?

What? Could you tell us a little bit more about that idea? Can you say more about that?

What do you mean by that?

Can you elaborate on that point a little more?

Tell us why you’ve chosen to do it that way.

What’s your evidence?

Can you give an example?

How did you arrive at that conclusion?

Is there anything in the text that made you think that?

What makes you say that?

Tell me why you think that way. Why?

What are the implications of your response?

## Sustaining the Questioning in action

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| Mrs Armitage | Is Antarctica in danger of devastation? What are the issues? Are they going to destroy Antarctica? | Josiah’s brief comment counts but importantly it is pursued as an idea to deepen. This signals to the students that they are responsible for participating in more substantive dialogue. The point is taken up as one to be noticed and explored and positions the student as a thinker.  The teacher’s question ‘Can you go a bit deeper for us?’ and the sequence, which follows, invites Josiah to sustain the flow of ideas and deepen his reasoning.  The teacher pauses for four seconds to wait for him to continue on with his idea. At the point of Bailey’s interruption, the teacher does two things: first she does not dismiss Bailey’s ideas completely (she returns to him later in the lesson) and she allows Josiah to sustain his turn – to finish his thought. |
| Josiah: | They could |
| Mrs Armitage | Could, why Josiah? Can you go a bit deeper for us? |
| Josiah | Because people do go there to try to stop it (0.4) |
| Mrs Armitage | Stop what? |
| Bailey | Stop global warming and stop tourists, like stop people coming to Antarctica. |
| Mrs Armitage | Hold on to your thoughts Bailey. Let Josiah finish his thought first. |
| Josiah | Well, some people go out to Antarctica and fish, fish everything out and so it might become more over fished |
| Mrs Armitage | That's interesting, Josiah. Can you say more about that idea? What are the implications of that, of overfishing? |
| Josiah | So like the penguins and whales are dying.  When the people like went there, to fish, like and they take too many fish, and the penguins have no food then. And like the Japanese whaling boats, they take too many, more than they need and they are becoming, um, extinct |

## 2 Extending and deepening thinking

Opening up the floor to other students is a practice, which invites the members of the class – as a community of learners – to explore ideas, opinions and concepts more deeply.

The teacher uses probing questions which provoke students to extend the thinking of others. In this they elaborate or add to the ideas and propositions of others, they provide more depth and detail, provide evidence to endorse the knowledge or facts being presented, and to substantiate thoughts, claims and opinions, or to clarify the responses of other students.

Evidentiary talk builds a foundation for developing knowledge and deepening reasoning when exploring complex ideas or difficult concepts. The practice enables students to build on half-formed ideas as the teacher presses for reasoning to substantiate points. It activates a principle for taking shared responsibility for learning.

**Some examples of questions to extend and deepen thinking:**

Who can tell me more about that idea?

Now dig deep, what else can you add to Maria’s point?

Who can add onto the idea that Jarrah is building?

Can anyone take that suggestion and push it a little further?

Why do you think Joseph came to that conclusion?

Who can add some evidence?

Is there anything from the text we read that you can add?

Tell me why you think, that way. Why?

What do you mean by that?

Who can give another example?

Where else can you find out?

What are the implications of Archie's response?

Use the Snowballing (Piggy-backing) strategy – In smaller groups, between them students build onto each other's ideas to extend the thought, broaden concepts and generate new learning.

## 3 Challenging thinking

This practice addresses the need for learners in the 21st century to develop skills and capacities for building argument, persuasion and exposition. Specifically, fostering this practice creates capacities for students to recognise and challenge bias, stereotypes, positioning and power. It also generates the ability to identify how some ideas, practices and ideologies in themselves, texts and the world around them are privileged over others. Underlying this is the reality that contemporary practices such as blogging, tweeting and podcasting invite students into the world of reasoned opinion, argument, debate, viewpoints, questioning, judgement, discussion and so on. So, challenging thinking is a practice whereby teachers are necessarily bridging schooling practices to contemporary conditions.

Using provocations like those exemplified below, scaffold students to not simply justify their own responses, but to assist them to respond to and build arguments, offer counter arguments, pose questions and to challenge the thinking or reasoning of others. Probes and provocations, which challenge thinking, assist to develop student's logical thinking abilities and capacities for persuasion and argumentation; questions for further investigation may be raised.

**Some examples of questions to encourage challenging thinking**

Would anyone like to respond to that idea?

Would what Maria Is saying apply In all circumstances?

Does anyone have a different opinion?

How else could we view this?

As a challenge or counter example: Does it always work that way?

How does that Idea square with Sierra's example?

How consistent Is this response with what others might be thinking?

How might we be able to combine both the Ideas of Patrick and Gemma?

What If It had been this Instead?

Do you agree/disagree? And why?

Are you saying the same thing as Josiah or something different, and If It's different, how Is It different?

As important as challenging thinking is encouraging students to challenge bias and stereotypes in texts and circumstances that they may encounter.

**Questions to guide a critical approach to 'reading' text or situation**

Whose story is this?

Who stands to benefit from this story?

Whose interests are being served? Challenged? Privileged? And why?

Who produced this text?

What is the purpose of this text?

Who is this text produced for?

Of what relevance is this text? How does it help us?

From whose perspective is this text constructed?

Are there other possible constructions from different points of views?

Whose interests are being served by this text?

What context (historical, social, cultural) is being reflected?

Who is excluded or included in this text? Why?

What assumptions about the potential audiences have been made?

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| **Challenging Thinking in Action: an example** | | |
| Mrs Armitage | Now before we move on, back to you Artie, what was your point? | As the sequence continues, the teacher opens up the space for multiple viewpoints with the question:  “does anyone else have a different view?' as a way to extend and challenge the thinking about this topic” |
| Artie | Well, I was just going to say about the fishing, if you stop tourists from going there, stop them fishing all the food away from the penguins. |
| Mrs Armitage | So there's another opinion, does anyone else have a different view? Is overfishing the main issue for Antarctica? Or tourists as Artie suggested? Okay, over to you Dylan, you look eager. |
| Dylan | Actually, my opinion is about global warming melting all the ice, it could melt. |

## 4 Demonstrating active listening

Through reframing a student's response, this listening practice aims to clarify the meanings students are generating in their talk (with the teacher always checking that the student is comfortable with the reframing). Student's turns are treated as resources for learning and further thinking as both teachers and class members listen to and engage with each other's contributions. As teachers and/or students revoice or repeat student's contributions, the talk displays they have listened to and considered the ideas, opinions or the facts in evidence of others.

Revoicing acts as a talk practice that leaves the next turn available for the student to respond again so that they may clarify their thought or extend it even further. It is a practice which demands interdependency between teachers and students as, for example, the teacher repeats or reformulates the student's contribution, in an attempt to clarify, or recast (rephrase or reframe) the response for the entire group, or compare it to someone else's contribution. This shows genuine engagement with the topic and can assist teachers in scaffolding the discussion further.

The practice creates a shared space by providing students with an 'assessment touchstone' as they hear back their articulate points and can check for clarity, meaning, relevance and accuracy. How to listen to and respond to each other's contributions is a skill which needs to be fostered and taught.

**Some examples of active listening**:

Do you know what I heard you doing/saying just then? –

You may not have realised It, but your point agrees with Jonah who suggested...

So you're saying that.........?

So, let me see if I've got what you're saying. Are you saying..? (always leaving space for the original student to agree or disagree and say more)

You said... is that what you mean?

Okay - so let me see if I've got your theory right. You're saying that...?

Can someone summarise what has been said?

Who can explain what Amy means when she say's that....?

Who thinks they could explain in their own words why Simon came up with that answer?

Why do you think he said that?

**Repeating:**

Who can say that again?

Who can repeat what Jason just said or put it into their own words?

After Partner talk - what did your partner say?

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| **Demonstrating Active Listening in Action: An Example** | | |
| Mrs Armitage | So, let me see, who can pull Jacinto's groups ideas about global warming together, a summary, to put it in a summary? You wanna have a go there Ryan? | The request for a summary which would 'pull Jacinto's groups' ideas about global warming together', opened up the space for students to demonstrate the reciprocity involved in active listening  - in repeating the ideas that were heard, Ryan and Christian showed that they *listened to their classmates as they shared their ideas and considered alternative viewpoints.*  Feedback by the teacher is minimal, so students are required to listen to each other |
| Ryan: | Well, climate change is making the air warmer, 3°, and it is causing the ice at the Antarctica melt. Um |
| Mrs Armitage | Go no |
| Ryan | Um, well, then that is changing the amount of ice for the penguins and killing whale food too// |
| Christian: | //There is more water then so some of the islands are disappearing |
| Mrs Armitage | Nice summary there, gentlemen, very crisp; you must have been listening hard. So we've got a few ideas to go on with by the sounds of it, you are developing some interesting bits of knowledge to put together for your final presentations; and good use of your technical terms too, everyone |

## 5 Allowing 'wait time' for thinking and formulating

The purpose of 'wait time' is to give students enough time to think before making a response they are comfortable with before they 'go public'. It is an inclusive practice as it doesn't put students on the spot to respond quickly; they have enough time to think through their ideas, to craft and rehearse responses. In addition, it is a practice where sufficient space is provided in both the talk sequence and formulating activities (for instance through partner talk or writing as thinking time). So, it is strategic to also consider what activities to put in place to enable focused thinking.

Teachers can provide wait time for thinking and formulating after posing a question, after calling on a student to answer or after a student gives a response.

**Some examples of allowing wait time**

This is a complex question, so we will allow some thinking time.

Take your time. We'll wait...

Hold on. Let John finish his thought.

It's okay, we'll wait for you to collect your thoughts...

Now that was an interesting idea, let's think about that some more

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| Mrs Armitage | Pardon, Dylan? Talk up, talk up. It could melt, how? | *Wait time* is deemed valuable and validated in this interaction, as the teacher both allows *wait time (four seconds) and adds time* here as she repeats Dylan’s point; in this she attributes value to what it as that Dylan was about to say. Repeating’ here serves as an effort to collaboratively build and extend thinking.  In the sequence, the teacher adds time for *Dylan to formulate his complete idea* as Jacinta attempts to interrupt. The teacher at this point validates the importance to *being responsible to the classroom community of learners* as Dylan is given the opportunity finish his thought, to talk some more to sustain his own idea. Following this, the teacher hands over the opportunity for someone else to *extend the thought*, clarify the idea and deepen the reasoning.  As an agentic move, Macy felt free to enter the dialogue at this point to build on to Dylan’s ideas as she *deepened the reasoning*. This acted as an *accumulation* of ideas which ‘chained’ them into coherent lines of thinking, understanding and reasoning |
| Dylan | Um, I forgot, u:um |
| Mrs Armitage | *It’s okay, we’ll wait for you to collect your thoughts*. ((4))You were saying about global warming melting the ice ((2)) |
| Dylan | Arh:h, yeah with global warming melting all the ice |
| Mrs Armitage | Ah, would that be a bad thing |
| Ss | Yes:s |
| S: | Climate change |
| Mrs Armitage | So you’re saying that melting the ice is a bad thing? Why? *Talk some more Dylan* or someone else from your group. |
| Dylan: | Well it, it is climate change, the temperature in the air is heating up// |
| Jacinta | .:::.:?::://3° higher |
| Mrs Armitage | *Wait, Jacinta, Dylan hasn’t finished his thought* |
| Dylan | Well the air is heating up 3°, and 5 times faster in some spots, so the ice is melting in the Southern Ocean, then there is more water, not the ice for the penguins./ |
| Macy | :.::/It also impacts lower countries in the oceans because of the ice melting, makes more water, you know and the sea level rises |
| .Mrs Armitage | Where is that happening? Did you find **that** out Macy |
| Macy | Um, the Maldives was one I think |

## 6 Ask open guiding questions

In one respect, teacher questioning although taken for granted, is a practice which often requires explicit thought and preparation. Asking more open questions is a practice that invites dialogue and aims to guide students into higher degrees of intellectual focus and cohesion so that they can participate in more substantive learning talk.

The practice is based on the premise 'good questions yield good responses'. Choosing the right question can lead learners to higher, more meaningful achievement. It enables a learning-focused pedagogy, which promotes students to engage with the topic.

*A guiding question* is one which opens up the learning space by providing a fundamental query that is directed towards developing understanding, and:

• embracing in-depth thinking and encourages scope for multiple viewpoints

• providing room in the talk for exploration through a range of lenses

provoking students to think deeply about the possibilities and issues• enabling critical reasoning as ideas are substantiated and justified

• allowing for flexibility in student response, investigation methods and presentation modes

• providing space for substantive (real, authentic, in depth) conversation

• engaging with topics with a high degree of intellectual focus.

**Some examples of open guiding questions**

What makes a sustainable rainforest?

What makes a good sports shoe?

What makes a hero?

What makes good government?

What makes an effective lesson?

What makes a good sport?

What makes a healthy diet?

Why is pollution harmful to the environment?

## Why Questions are the Essence of Inquiry

Some questions do not guide learners to explore their ideas and thinking in more open or enabling ways. Rather they are more limiting on the face of it, and without opening the fourth turn to an extended response may lead students to answer in a particular and often constrained way or to simply seek what is in the teacher's mind *or right answerism*. The answer is generally contained in the question itself; for instance, the question 'Is smoking bad for your health?' may lead students to answer 'Yes, it is bad'; or the questions 'Is pollution bad?' and 'Does pollution ruin the environment?' may lead students to consider a more narrow answer chain of responses that suggest 'Yes pollution is bad', and 'It ruins the environment.' Unless, in the fourth turn, students are then encouraged to go further and to extend their thinking.

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| **Asking open guiding questions in action:** **an example** | | |
| Mrs Armitage | :Okay, by wandering around listening to what you were discussing in your groups, we’ve got a couple of things to consider as *we were thinking about our big question//* | In this opening sequence, open questions are used to guide the student contributions (which had happened immediately prior to this). The teache*r expects that* multiple viewpoints will be forthcoming as students depth their thinking about the topic. Evidence will be used to support student claims. |
| Toby: | //*What is the biggest issue facing the future of Antarctica?* |
| Mrs Armitage | Right Toby, thanks for reminding us of that, *is Antarctica in danger of devastation? What are the issues? Are they going to destroy Antarctica?* |

## 7 Vacating the floor

In this practice, the teacher reconfigures the material and organisational arrangements of the classroom to enable her to 'step out' of the discussion - the students are handed control of the dialogue enabling:

• all students the opportunity to talk

• the creation of a physical activity space for students to think about, develop, rehearse and/or test ideas before they are made public on a larger forum (the whole class)

• time to be added with more opportunities for students to listen to and respond to each other's ideas

• responsibilities to be dispersed and shared among students. They take more ownership and exercise agency as the discursive structures are shifted to equalise the power balance between students and between the teacher and the students

• collaboration to be facilitated across space and time as students think and talk together in smaller grouping configurations - in pairs or small groups. They have a chance to come to consensus and to synthesise information or ideas

• opportunities for different leading roles across the phases of the knowledge construction.

## Some examples of vacating the floor strategies

*Turn-to-Talk* - Turn to your talk, partner/s to - find out, summarise, clarify, share your ideas, point of view or opinions

*Eye-to-Eye Knee-to-Knee* –Students turn to sit facing each other, then they share ideas, opinions and knowledge and sometimes construct a list of main learning points from the lesson

*EACH strategy* - In pairs or small groups students discuss or write what was EAsy and CHallenging about the concept/s being discussed.

*Mind-mapping* - Students organise their learning into a visual record of ideas and knowledge; they can do this in pairs, small groups or independently. This form of note-taking can be used for creating overviews, revising discussions and conducting group reviews.

*Think, write, share* - Students consider and write down their thoughts individually, then get into pairs to come up with one piece of writing reflecting the main points of the lesson.

*Think, pair, share* - Students think about the learning focus, then share their thoughts, ideas and knowledge with a partner.

*Think, pair, square* - Students think about the learning focus; then they share their thoughts, ideas and knowledge with a partner. This first pair formation then constructs a joint summary between them. The pairs then join with another pair, share their paired summaries and collaborate to co-produce another joint summary.

*Three-step interview* - In pairs, students formulate a given number of questions and interview each other about the topic of the lesson, taking notes as they go. The pairs then join with another pair. Each learner introduces her/his partner and shares (paraphrases) what the partner had to say about the topic.

*Expert jigsaw* - Students acquire and share some new knowledge with a home group. The learning task or text is divided so that no one learner completes the whole task or reads the whole text; all students are responsible for others' learning. Each team member selects one aspect (or text section) to complete, then joins those others who are 'experts' on that aspect/ section. The expert groups share information about their topic. Students then return to their home groups and teach their teammates what they have learned

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| Vacating the floor in action: an example | | |
| Ahmed | Introduce the topic you are going to present | In this sequence, Mrs Clarke first probes Ahmed to *sustain his thinking* and to build on to his own point. She then changes the classroom ‘setups’ or organisational arrangements to have the students turn to each other to *think and talk together* using the ‘Knee-to-Knee’ strategy. In this, the teacher *vacates the floor*, enabling each student to have  • have the opportunity to talk with their partner  • more time to think about the question  • time to articulate and rehearse their ideas  In the report back, students *demonstrate active listening* by reporting back what their partner said |
| Mrs Clarke: | Right, *any more thoughts Ahmed*? |
| Ahmed | You could ask them what they already know about your topic, … (faint) |
| Mrs Clarke | Yeah so, that they’ll know what they’re going to hear, right Ahmed. :. They know what they’re going to be listening to. Okay let’s have a *think together*. I’ve got a couple of key questions for you. Can you knee to knee someone? ((Students turn to face another student, knees facing towards each other)). Okay first one. What will be the challenges for you to do this? What will be the hard things about doing [your presentations]?...  *((Students in pairs talking to each other, 3 minutes))* |
| Mrs Clarke | Okay turn back this way, quickly. Okay what do you think the challenges will be, *what points did your partner raise*, Amelia? |