

North Yorkshire County Council

TALK FOR LEARNING: THE FIRST YEAR

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First formative evaluation of North Yorkshire's
Talk for Learning Project,
part of the Council's Education Development Plan for 2002-7

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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Part I – The context, character and organisation of TLP	
1.1 The project in the context of EDP II	4
1.2 The key idea: dialogic teaching	5
1.3 The schools	7
1.4 Advisory support	8
1.5 Professional orientation and training	8
1.6 Cover	9
1.7 The use of video	9
1.8 The school projects	10
1.9 Finance	11
Part II – Evaluative commentary	
2.1 The training programme and associated documentation	12
2.2 The focus of school projects	13
2.3 The use of video	15
2.4 Advisory support	18
2.5 Support in the school	19
2.6 Obstacles to success	19
2.7 Insight and impact	20
2.8 The next stage	23
Part III - Conclusion	
Summary of main findings and recommendations	26
Appendices	
1 The Talk for Learning Project as specified in EDP II	30
2 Schools involved in the project and their agreed TLP themes for 2002-3	32
3 Indicators of dialogic teaching	35
4 Evaluation questionnaire, June 2003	39
5 Schools visited for the 2002-3 evaluation	41

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first of a sequence of annual reports on the progress of North Yorkshire's Talk for Learning Project (TLP), a key element in the county's second Education Development Plan (EDP II). TLP aims to harness the power of talk to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Authority's primary schools and to raise standards of children's attainment, especially but not exclusively in literacy and numeracy. Its principle medium is 'dialogic teaching.'

EDP II started in April 2002, and two months later staff from the nominated TLP schools came together for the first of their orientation and training sessions. They then worked with their designated TLP 'link advisers' to identify the aspects of their teaching on which they would concentrate during 2002-3, and during the autumn term made the baseline video recordings which have played a key role in both professional development and the evaluation of the project as a whole, and will continue to do so.

This report first sets out the purposes, character, chronology and logistics of TLP, and then draws on various data sources to assess its progress and impact to date, and to offer reflections and suggestions for the next stage of development.

The evaluation has been carried out by the project's consultant, Professor Robin Alexander of Cambridge University, working to a specification agreed with the TLP advisory team. The evaluation has included the following:

- Scrutiny of all relevant documentation – EDPII, correspondence with DfES, letters to schools, material prepared for the training days, reports on the school visits made by the project's link advisers, and material prepared by the schools themselves to support and/or monitor their part of the project.
- Termly meetings with the Chief Adviser and other members of the TLP advisory team, culminating in a half-day evaluation meeting on 18 June 2003, led by the consultant, which reviewed the progress of the project as a whole.
- Analysis of responses to a specially-devised questionnaire about the first year's experience of TLP which was sent to all schools in the project (except the late-joining Scarborough schools – see 1.8) during June 2003 (Appendix 3).
- A series of half-day visits by the consultant to a sample of eight project schools (Appendix 4) during which he viewed and discussed clips from schools' baseline and later videotapes, interviewed heads and other staff involved in the project, and observed teaching.

The evaluation's stance is open, collaborative and formative. This is consistent with the approach taken by TLP itself, and indeed with the idea of dialogue which is central to the whole enterprise.

This report is in three parts. Part I describes the context of TLP, the thinking and research which have informed it, and its main features. Part II draws on the evaluation data to provide a commentary on these matters, ending with suggestions for the next stage and the longer term. Part III summarises the report's main findings and recommendations. The appendices give further information about the project's EDP framework, the participating schools and their TLP projects, the principles and indicators of dialogic teaching, and the evaluation itself.

PART I – THE CONTEXT, CHARACTER AND ORGANISATION OF TLP

1.1 The project in the context of EDP II

The Council's second Education Development Plan starts from a comparatively high level of pupil attainment, as measured by national tests, but notes a recent tendency for results in North Yorkshire primary schools to 'plateau'. In particular, though standards have risen at each key stage since 1998, at KS2 they have remained constant since 2001.

EDP II commits the Authority to achieving further improvements overall, and to meeting challenging new targets in English and mathematics for 2003 and 2004. Thus in 2003, 87 per cent of Year 6 pupils will be expected to achieve Level 4 or above in English and 85 per cent in mathematics. For 2004, the Level 4+ Y6 targets are 90 per cent in English and 89 per cent in mathematics. These figures cover a wide target spectrum for individual schools which rises to 100 per cent for several of them.

To support this effort, EDPII identifies two broad 'domains' of activity. One is concerned with school improvement, the other with access and inclusion. The first domain has in turn four priorities and the first of these is to raise attainment in early years and primary education. To address this priority, EDPII then outlines six specific initiatives, the first of which is *English: talk in teaching and learning*, the focus of this report, and hereafter referred to as TLP (the Talk for Learning Project). The other related initiatives are mathematics, science, the curriculum as a whole, inclusion, leadership / management / governance. The Authority has also made it clear that it sees the focus on talk as a significant contributory factor in the success of its other curriculum initiatives, and throughout this first year much has been made of the centrality of talk to all teaching and learning – a stance which is wholly consistent with the national and international evidence, as we see below, but which is as yet insufficiently recognised in the broader contexts of policy and professional practice.

The relevant section of EDPII is in Appendix 1. As specified there, TLP entails:

- A core team of committed advisers who lead the project and provide support for it, both in schools through a 'link adviser' scheme and in county-level training sessions.
- The identification of a social and demographic cross-section of primary schools which have been judged 'high performing' in terms of evidence from Ofsted inspections and/or KS2 tests.
- Participation by these school representatives at orientation, training and review days to which advisers, teachers and external experts contribute and at which the teachers are encouraged to share their ideas and experiences.
- Identification and monitoring of specific TLP projects for each participating school.
- The use of video to provide teachers, schools, the Authority and the project's evaluation with process baseline data and a means of marking the trajectory of individual teachers' pedagogical progress over the entire EDP period (2002-7), and to serve as a tool for professional self-evaluation and development.
- Grounding the entire project in a coherent theory of talk in teaching and learning which builds on national and international research.

- The use of an external consultant to help develop the project's theoretical stance and modality, and to support its evaluation.

1.2 The key idea: dialogic teaching

TLP's focus on talk arose from a convergence of a number of factors:

- concern, as noted above, about the loss of momentum in the Authority's drive to raise standards in early years and primary education;
- a strong prior commitment to the importance of talk among the Authority's advisory team (for example: the Chief Adviser had worked with Professor Tony Edwards, one of the UK's leading experts in this field, at the University of Newcastle; one of her colleagues had worked with Dr Joan Tough on the influential Schools Council Communication Skills project at Leeds University, and later at the same university on several projects with this project's consultant; other members of the advisory team had been associated with the National Oracy Project);
- the publication and dissemination of Professor Alexander's comparative research on primary education in England, France, India, Russia and the United States, one of whose lines of enquiry was the quality and impact of teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil discourse.¹

During the summer and autumn of 2001, Professor Alexander presented findings and implications from his research at seminars organised by QCA, Ofsted and NLS. He also discussed the issues with ministers at DfES and members of the Downing Street Policy Unit. Following the QCA event (in July 2001) QCA launched two parallel initiatives. The first was the preparation of a multimedia pack to support dialogic teaching in primary schools, for which Alexander served as consultant and co-author, and which is due to be published in late 2003 or early 2004.² The videotape which forms part of this pack includes sequences from primary schools in North Yorkshire, Barking and Dagenham, and Knowsley. The second brought together Alexander's work on dialogic teaching with research on the grammar of talk being pursued by Professor Ron Carter at Nottingham University. This, as a set of 'new perspectives' on English attainment target En1 (speaking and listening) was disseminated to schools and LEAs in spring 2003.³ Then, following the NLS seminar, the NLS directorate requested NLS regional staff to give more prominence to talk in their dealings with LEAs and schools, and with the merger of NLS into the government's new Primary Strategy from May 2003, this increased emphasis fed into the preparation of QCA's revised guidance on attainment target EN1 (Speaking and Listening)⁴ and into the Primary Strategy's training programme for 2003-4. In parallel with these national developments, Alexander was extending the coverage of his dissemination to take in LEAs, including North Yorkshire, whose advisory service organised a conference to discuss the research, and view clips from its video database, on 17 December 2001. By that time, the Authority had also become aware of the interest of NLS in the research through its regional director. As a result, the Authority incorporated dialogic teaching into its EDPII.

It must be stressed that TLP is grounded in more than one research project, and that the project in question is itself located within a long and currently reviving tradition of theoretical and empirical work on the role of talk in learning and teaching, whose key figures have included psycholinguists (Halliday, Wells), sociolinguists (Barnes, Edwards, Stubbs, Heath), classroom researchers (Mercer,

¹ Alexander, R.J. (2000) *Culture and Pedagogy: international comparisons in primary education*, London: Blackwell, especially pp 391-528.

² QCA/DfES (2003/4) *Teaching Through Dialogue*, London: QCA/DfES

³ QCA (ed) (2003) *New Perspectives on Spoken English in the Classroom: discussion papers*, London: QCA.

⁴ QCA/DfES (2003) *Speaking, Listening, Learning: working with children in KS1 and 2*, London: QCA/DfES.

Galton, Hargreaves, Hardman, Alexander), discourse analysts (Sinclair, Coulthard, Dillon), and perhaps most notably, cognitive and cultural psychologists (Vygotsky, Bruner, Cole, Wertsch and others, especially in the United States and Russia). To this was added the distinctive philosophical perspective on dialogue of Vygotsky's Russian contemporary Bakhtin.

The classroom research evidence from a number of different studies is broadly consistent with the comparative classroom discourse data from Alexander's five-country study. It confirms the sometimes problematic state of talk in English classrooms and the need for it to be handled in radically new ways if its potential to promote and accelerate children's learning is to be fully achieved. In brief, by comparison with many other countries, including some of England's most successful competitors, English primary education (as a matter of general tendency, with due and generous allowance for exceptions):

- views talk as a means of learning rather than an object of learning in its own right;
- fails to integrate oracy with literacy;
- does not fully exploit the learning potential of oral teaching;
- focuses much more on written than oral learning tasks and modes of assessment and thus misses important opportunities for assessment for learning;
- emphasises the social and affective functions of talk at the expense of the cognitive;
- uses forms of teaching and classroom organisation which militate against the concentration, engagement and sustained interaction on which cognitively-effective talk depends;
- is dominated by closed questions inviting recall, limited 'wait' time for pupil thinking, brief answers which deliver information rather than access speculation and problem-solving, feedback which praises and supports but does not diagnose and inform, many questions from teachers but few from pupils, and little systematic building upon answers in order to construct coherent lines of reasoning and enquiry.

Further, although the national literacy and numeracy strategies (NLNS) have promoted 'interactive whole class teaching' and have transformed the organisation and dynamics of this particular kind of talk, recent research suggests that the strategies may not have had the same impact on those deeper layers of teacher-pupil and pupil-discourse through which ideas are most potently conveyed, exchanged and developed, or on the other kinds of talk (for example, teacher-led discussion, pupil-led discussion) which a modern teaching repertoire requires.⁵ The official OISE evaluation itself concludes that 'the intended changes in teaching and learning have not yet been fully realised' and that 'it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effect of the Strategies on pupil learning'.⁶

If the quality of classroom talk has the power to enable or inhibit cognition and learning to the extent indicated by research such as that cited here, then the problem which needs to be addressed concerns not just how talk is transacted but also how it is conceived. The idea of 'dialogic teaching' has been developed both as a corrective to the tendencies summarised above and as a means of placing more firmly within professional consciousness ideas and procedures which have strong international currency but which, as yet, have made rather less professional headway in the UK.

Dialogic teaching is located alongside more familiar kinds of teaching talk such as rote, recitation, exposition and discussion, and - unlike interactive whole class teaching - is less a specific

⁵ Hardman, F., Smith, F., Wall, K. (2003) ' "Interactive whole class teaching" in the National Literacy Strategy', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(2), pp 197-215; Moyles, J., Hargreaves, L. et al (2003) *Interactive Teaching in the Primary School*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

⁶ Earl, E. et al (2003) *Watching and Learning 3: final report of the external evaluation of England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies*, Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, p 3.

organisational procedure than a generic quality of classroom talk which should be striven for in different organisational and interactive contexts. It rests on five key principles:

- *collectivity*: teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class;
- *reciprocity*: teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints;
- *cumulation*: teachers and children build on their own and each others' ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry;
- *support*: children articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings;
- *purposefulness*: the dialogue is planned and transacted with specific learning outcomes clearly in view.

Dialogic teaching requires particularly close attention to:

- the different contexts of talk – whole class, collective (teacher-led) group, collaborative (pupil-led) group, individual;⁷
- the purpose of questions (e.g. elicitation, recall, instruction, management, routine, probing) and their structure (e.g. closed, open, directive, leading, narrow, discursive);⁸
- the form of answers (e.g. factual, analytical, speculative, hypothesising, evaluative) and their length;
- the feedback which answers receive (e.g. evaluative, motivational, diagnostic, neutral);⁹
- the way answers are built upon in order to take thinking forward;
- the length of exchanges;
- roles and procedures for pupil-pupil discussion;¹⁰
- classroom climate and relationships;
- classroom organisation and layout;
- lesson planning and structure;
- the teacher subject knowledge needed for extended exchanges;
- ground rules governing the effective conduct of dialogic talk in classroom settings (attending, listening, speaking loudly and clearly, respecting alternative viewpoints etc).

TLP has been informed by a number of working papers on these matters. One of these, which sets out a number of practical 'indicators' against which the character of classroom talk can be checked for its dialogic potential, appears as this report's Appendix 3.

The LEA team who have developed and steered TLP have no illusions about the fundamental novelty of this approach in many English classrooms, or about the extent to which it challenges cherished assumptions and established habits of classroom behaviour, for both teachers and children.

1.3 The schools

For the June 2002 launch of TLP the Authority identified 55 primary schools on the basis of the 'high performance' criteria discussed above and invited their heads to attend the first orientation day. For

⁷ For an overall analytical framework covering the purposes, organisation and character of classroom talk, see Alexander, R.J. (2000) *Culture and Pedagogy*, Oxford: Blackwell, Fig 16.2, p 517.

⁸ Brown, G. and Wragg, E.C. (1993) *Questioning*, London: Routledge; and Dillon, J.T. (1990) *The Practice of Questioning*, London: Routledge.

⁹ Mills, K. (1998) *Questions, Answers and Feedback in Primary Teaching*, Warwick: University of Warwick Centre for Research in Elementary and Primary Education, pp 5-8.

¹⁰ Dawes, L., Mercer, N., Wegerif, R. (2000) *Thinking Together: a programme of activities for developing thinking skills at KS2*, Birmingham: Questions Publishing Co.

various reasons - staff changes, imminent Ofsted inspections, and so on - some of these were unable to accept the invitation or accepted and were then forced by circumstances to withdraw from the project. The group then stabilised at 42 schools, all of whom remain in TLP at the end of its first year.

During the latter part of the year the Authority brought a further six primary schools and one secondary school into the project. All are part of the separate Scarborough Locality Plan, and have profiles somewhat different from the smaller, mostly rural schools which form the project's main constituency. The Scarborough schools are large, and face typically urban social and educational challenges. Because four of these schools joined TLP very late in the year, and two do not start until September 2003, they have not been included in the 2002-3 evaluation.

A full list of TLP schools appears in Appendix 2.

1.4 Advisory support

To support the project, the Authority nominated a 'Talk for Teaching and Learning Team' of eight of its advisers (Kathy Fiddes, Jan Frankland, Fiona Lovell, Janet Peacock, Mark Poole, Rosemary Rayne, Mike Smit, Dot Sutherland) led by the Chief Adviser, Edna Sutton, and including the Authority's Strategy Managers for NLS and NNS. Most of these were designated 'link advisers' to a group of participating schools, with the brief to visit each school at least once a term and be available to respond to queries at other times. Collectively, this group has steered and monitored the project, meeting three times each term. Working with the project's consultant, they also devised and staffed the training days. Day-to-day management of the project has been undertaken by Edna Sutton and Kathy Fiddes.

When visiting their schools, advisers have viewed and discussed baseline and later videotapes with the participating teachers, leaving written summaries of their observations and suggestions.

This very substantial commitment of time by the advisory team has been additional to the normal advisory school caseload, and indeed several advisers have visited their link schools more frequently than the agreed minimum.

1.5 Professional orientation and training

Five full days have been devoted to TLP orientation and training:

Day 1: 25 June 2002, Harrogate

Day 2: 26 June 2002, Harrogate

Day 3: 10 July 2002, Boroughbridge

Day 4: 22 January 2003, Boroughbridge

Day 5: 9 July 2003, Boroughbridge

The first two days were conceived as a unit, with the third to consolidate its messages and secure a basis for the start of the project in the participating schools.

Day 1 was opened by the Director of Education, and featured contributions from Kevan Collins (then Deputy Director of the National Literacy Strategy, now Director of the National Primary Strategy) on the achievements and prospects of the NLS; and from Robin Alexander on the importance of talk in teaching and learning, using video clips from his international research. These sessions led into the first of several group discussions to help schools identify what they might gain from the project.

Day 2 had a sharper focus, with a further contribution from Robin Alexander containing a framework for analysing and promoting dialogic teaching, a carousel of shorter presentations from members of the advisory team about the potential for talk in literacy, numeracy, science and humanities, for gifted and talented children, and to enhance children's 'thinking skills', and further small group discussions about possible areas of enquiry.

Day 3 concentrated on deepening participants' understanding of the characteristics of dialogic teaching by getting them to analyse video clips of whole class teaching, teacher-led group discussion and collaborative group work using a simple proforma devised for the purpose. There was then a session about the importance and uses of video in the project, followed by further group discussions with advisers to refine the schools' chosen areas of enquiry.

Copies of papers and overheads were circulated to participants between these three opening days, including (for Day 3) the list of dialogic teaching indicators which appear in revised form in Appendix 3.

By Day 4, nearly all the participating schools had made their baseline videos and launched their projects, so a major purpose of the day was to share experiences (including clips from some of the project videotapes). In addition, the advisory team fed in frameworks for analysing, planning and evaluating classroom talk, drawing on QCA's Speaking and Listening framework, an updated illustrative application of Bloom's 1956 taxonomy of cognitive objectives, and an adaptation of the material presented on previous days by Robin Alexander.

Day 5 reviewed progress so far. Participants brought video clips to share and discussed their experiences. Robin Alexander reported findings from this evaluation and set the project in the context of national developments and initiatives.

Each of the five days included a major presentation by the Chief Adviser, Edna Sutton, setting the project in context, reinforcing its purposes, summarising progress to date and outlining the next stage.

In addition, the Authority also organised optional technical training sessions on the use of the video packs in Harrogate, Scarborough, Skipton and Selby in late September and early October 2002.

1.6 Cover

The Authority paid the cost to schools of buying in supply teachers to enable participating staff to be released to attend the five training days. In addition, they funded each school for a further four days so that teachers could be freed from teaching to work on their projects in school time. The total of nine days' cover for each participating teacher at the current supply cost of £145 per day represented a considerable commitment by the Authority.

1.7 The use of video

Video is central to TLP. It serves both to provide baseline and progress data for the project's formative and longer-term evaluation and to prompt and support individual professional self-evaluation and development. Each participating school was asked to make a baseline video as early in the school year as possible, and thereafter to make regular tapes to monitor and support progress. To support both self-evaluation and external project evaluation, teachers have been asked to label, date and archive all their videotapes.

Each school's video pack included:

- Digital camera
- Case
- Tripod
- Videotapes
- Radio microphone
- Conference microphone
- CD disc

The need to capture sound as well as vision is of paramount importance in a project of this kind, and for this reason each pack included three microphones: the camera microphone for general and whole class use; a conference microphone for groups; and a radio microphone for individual interactions or for retaining a constant sound level for the teacher when he/she is moving round the classroom.

As noted in this report's introduction, a few schools did not make their baseline videotapes until the start of the second term – in one case, not until February 2003. However, most (85%) did so before early November 2002. Thereafter, schools made between 1 and 8 further tapes, averaging 4 overall.

1.8 The school projects

A full list of the individual projects negotiated between participating schools and their link advisers appears in Appendix 2.

Most schools have involved just one class in the project, some of them containing two age groups, usually Years 5 and 6. A significant minority have involved two classes, and one school has brought in all thirteen of its classes. Notwithstanding this predominant concentration on one class only, exactly the same proportion of schools (57%) say that TLP is being treated as a whole-school activity. 'Whole school' in this context therefore means that TLP is discussed by the *staff* as a whole in the context of policy and development planning rather than that all the school's *pupils* are involved.

Schools were encouraged from the outset to focus on teaching and learning during the final years of Key Stage 2 in order to address the problem of 'plateauing' attainment levels referred to in 1.1 above. However, this was advice only, and though most of the schools have confined the project to years 5 and/or 6, the others have spread it more widely, concentrating mainly on KS2 but in some cases involving reception and Y1 classes. We should bear in mind, however, that a large proportion of TLP schools are relatively small and have mixed-age classes.

Schools have chosen to work in various areas of the curriculum. The larger proportion are working on talk in the context of English. The rest are spread across a variety of curriculum areas: mathematics, science, history, humanities and, a significant cluster, generic fields such as PSHE, citizenship and 'thinking skills'.

Schools were asked to specify the organisational context (whole class/group/individual) for their chosen project focus. The idea here was to encourage teachers to work on one specific aspect of their practice at a time rather than allow their analysis and development efforts to be diffused. However, slightly over half of the schools chose to tackle talk in the context of both whole class *and* group work, while the rest concentrated on whole class teaching *or* group work. None worked on one-to-one interaction.

The training days devoted considerable time to setting out frameworks for conceptualising, analysing and evaluating classroom talk and in pursuit of this analytical intent teachers were encouraged to restrict their projects not just to particular organisational contexts for talk as above, but also to talk of specific kinds, drawing on, for example, Alexander's distinctions between discourse *forms* (expository, interrogatory, evaluative, dialogic) and discourse teaching *functions* (rote, recitation, instruction/exposition, discussion, scaffolding) (see Appendix 3).

The majority of respondents to the questionnaire said that they had chosen *discussion*. A significant but smaller number nominated teacher *questioning*. A minority, including some observed during the school visits, said that they were working in a more specialised way on specific teaching strategies such as paired discussion and class debate, for example in the case of the school which sought to develop children's skills to marshal and present evidence, listen to and assess arguments, using the forum of simulated public enquiries. Some linked this kind of approach to interest provoked by recent in-service activity on philosophy in the primary school, and indeed generally we found teachers finding common cause between the messages of this project and those of other initiatives – philosophy, thinking skills, citizenship, circle time – all of which, in different ways, seek to empower children's thinking through talk.

It is clear from both the questionnaires and the school visits, however, that in nominating 'discussion' some teachers had in mind the goal of making their question-and-answer recitation teaching more discursive and exploratory rather than setting up discussions as more commonly understood. In this, they were clearly influenced both by what they observed on their videotapes and by the training days' concern with the persistence in English classrooms of the traditional dynamic of closed question leading to factual answer and minimal feedback.

1.9 Finance

The Council initially hoped that the project's pivotal position within EDPII, and its potential importance nationally as a model for school improvement and professional development in this critical but neglected field, would encourage DfES to provide a measure of support from central funds. Correspondence from late 2001 and early 2002 between the Director of Education and DfES's Director General for Schools (Peter Housden) and Senior Education Adviser (Steve Turnbull) discuss the Authority's concern about the level of funding available to enable LEAs such as North Yorkshire to deliver their EDP priorities. In the event, however, TLP was funded jointly from EDPII, the Standards Fund and a CAMAS (Curriculum and Management Advisory Services) underspend.

The estimated cost of the project to 1 July 2003 is £205,128. This includes start-up ICT costs for equipping each participating school with the video kit specified at 1.6 (£85,926), and recurrent supply and venue costs in connection with the training days and school release outlined at 1.5 and 1.6 (£119,202). There are further hidden costs: the fees and expenses of the project's consultant and – especially – the commitment, over and above their existing workload, of members of the TLP advisory team, each of whom contributed a minimum of 17 days to the project between June 2002 and July 2003 (most contributed more, and some substantially more, giving a total of well in excess of 140 adviser days).

PART II – EVALUATIVE COMMENTARY

2.1 The training programme and associated documentation

While the training programme was in general well received by those who participated, two aspects provoked somewhat mixed messages.

First, most teachers welcomed the extensive documentation distributed on and before the training days but some were overwhelmed by its sheer bulk, or found it conceptually difficult. This applied especially to the material prepared for the first three days, in June and July 2002, which provoked comments such as ‘too advanced’, ‘very technical’, ‘rather vast’ and ‘woolly’ alongside the more positive ‘interesting’, ‘thought provoking’ and ‘useful’.

This mix of reactions was duplicated in respect of the days themselves. Most respondents warmly welcomed the opportunity to share ideas with colleagues and some were stimulated by the entire programme, but generally the first three days were viewed as tough and perhaps somewhat confusing whereas the January day produced a more uniformly positive response.

These reactions can be explained in a number of ways. First, the Authority made a conscious decision to opt for an intellectually-demanding and exploratory form of training rather than the more familiar one of firmly practical sessions which steer teachers in a particular direction. For those teachers who attended in the expectation of being told what to do this relatively novel and more challenging format came as a not entirely welcome surprise.

Second, the messages of the sessions were not always felt to be consistent. For example, the literacy and numeracy strategies emphasise, and require, ‘pacy’ teaching, and this is underlined by the way time is divided during the literacy and numeracy lessons. In contrast, TLP is more interested in cognitive pace, or what some teachers called – simplifying the project’s research-derived distinction between ‘organisational’, ‘task’, ‘interactive’, ‘cognitive’ and ‘learning’ pace¹¹ – ‘pace not race’. Thus, the strategies’ emphasis on a rapid interactive pace is in some respects and some circumstances at odds with the emphasis in TLP and its informing research on giving pupils time to think and on asking them questions which encourage them to do so. Given the important place of the strategies in the work of primary schools it is thus understandable if some schools sensed a certain conflict of messages.

Third, some of the documentation had a strong research orientation and this was again somewhat different to the kind of material which many teachers were used to.

The result was that for many teachers it was not until the January session – by which time, crucially, most had made their baseline and perhaps one or more follow-up videotapes and had discussed these with their link advisers – that the nature and implications of the project began to be properly understood.

This experience suggests that an alternative, and more gradualist format might have been more appropriate. Equally, it confirms the genuinely radical nature of what North Yorkshire is attempting to achieve. If teachers had been clear and contented from the outset, it is almost certainly the case that this would have been because the project was merely confirming their existing thinking and practice and demanding little that was really new.

¹¹ Alexander, 2000 *op cit*, pp 418-426.

However, it is now important that the ideas and documentation which provoked such mixed reactions at the start of the project should be revisited, for they contain key points of reference and criteria for the analysis and evaluation of emerging classroom practice which become all the more important as that practice begins to change.

It is no less important that future training days, now that the shock of the project's initial messages and approach has subsided, should build upon the analytical emphasis which caused the early difficulties referred to here.

Finally, the range of comments on the training days must be interpreted in part as a reflection of the inevitable fact that the teachers who attended had different needs, different kinds of experience, and had reached different points in their professional thinking and development. A single training programme can never address with equal success the needs and circumstances of all its participants, and this is why the work of link advisers is so critical to the project's success.

2.2 The focus of school projects

From the choice of projects summarised in 1.8 it is clear that the general messages of the training days have in fact been reasonably well understood. The participating teachers have registered certain core ideas - the power of discussion, the need to move from closed and rapid-fire IRF exchanges to more extended sequences which remain with given ideas, and with given pupils, for longer, the importance of giving children time to think rather than requiring instant answers, the need to make talk a genuinely collective activity in which listening is no less significant than speaking - and have attempted to introduce these into their teaching. The videotapes and lessons observed during the evaluation visits confirm the seriousness of their efforts to effect genuine change.

Thus, in the schools visited for the evaluation, we observed, on tape or in reality:

- teachers relying less on *bidding* (children competing with each other to answer questions by putting their hands up) and more on *nomination* (when teachers direct questions to named children) in order both to reduce the dominance of exchanges by certain children and to enable teachers to target their questions more precisely with children's individual capacities in mind;
- teachers fostering extended exchanges with the same pupil rather than moving from one pupil to the next after a single question; that is to say, shifting from an interactive strategy of *rotation* (questions round the class) to *extension* (pursuing a line of enquiry in depth with a smaller number of pupils while the others listen);
- teachers establishing ground rules for the conduct of collective talk (for example, two schools' 'good listening contract' which encouraged children to listen carefully, not to interrupt, to think about what they hear, and to seek clarification if they do not understand);
- teachers working on the habitual tendency to repeat or reformulate children's answers, instead inviting other children to comment on them;
- teachers changing the balance of closed and open questions, and striving to avoid the heavily *cued elicitations* (for example mouthing or sounding the first letters of the required answer) which are part of the more familiar teaching repertoire;

- teachers resisting the natural urge to fill silences after questions, and instead waiting patiently for children to think about their answers, meanwhile discouraging the frantic handwaving and ‘miss...miss...’ which is so offputting to the child who is struggling to marshal his or her thoughts;
- children in collaborative discussion listening to rather than talking at or past each other, and turn-taking becoming *sequential* rather than *overlapping*, with far less of the habitual interruption which more commonly characterises adult as well as child discussion;
- children speaking within small groups or whole classes more loudly, clearly and confidently than is commonly the case in English primary classrooms;
- children venturing ideas, and offering speculation and hypothesis, rather than seeking to spot and provide the ‘right’ answer;
- less able children taking a more prominent part in lessons than they would in the more usual formula of closed (and competitive) question and answer followed by written work;
- children being encouraged to help each other to respond to the thinking challenges which the teacher has set;
- teachers and children talking about talk (thus countering Deborah Cameron’s criticism that in English classrooms we tend to see talk as the convenient medium of instruction, and little more, rather than one of the main *objects* of instruction¹²).

All of these changes are consistent with the idea of dialogic teaching which underpins TLP and to this extent it is entirely appropriate and valid to report in this first evaluation that TLP has already made a discernible and positive impact on the culture and processes of teaching and learning in the classrooms of many of the participating schools.

This is an encouraging picture. Yet three notes of caution are also necessary.

- By and large in the school projects, teachers are devoting greater attention to children’s talk than to their own. The advisory team have pointed out that they encouraged schools to build on existing work rather than launch something wholly new. This made sense, and – in the context of other current school and Authority initiatives such as *Let’s Think* – it explains why so many schools chose to work on *discussion*. Given that the advancement of children’s learning is what schools are for, these foci are in an obvious sense appropriate. However, where they imply that teacher-led talk merits little or no scrutiny this is, no less obviously, unsatisfactory, for the role of the teacher in questioning, instruction, exposition and scaffolded dialogue is critical, and the quality of children’s talk in the classroom is directly related to that of the teacher.
- Many teachers are claiming to be advancing scaffolded dialogue, but on the evidence available this is not always what is taking place. Scaffolding is a complex and challenging notion, and its success depends on the teacher having a precise awareness of how far the child’s present thinking has advanced, together with the subject knowledge and verbal dexterity to frame questions which engage with that level of thinking but also nudge it forward, and which reduce the possibility of error without actually cueing the preferred response, so that the child achieves the necessary

¹² Cameron, D. (2003) ‘Schooling spoken language: beyond “communication” ’ in QCA (ed) *New Perspectives on Spoken English in the Classroom: discussion papers*, London: QCA, pp 64-72.

cognitive 'handover' independently.¹³ Thus, getting the *conditions* for scaffolding right – extension rather than rotation, increased 'wait' or thinking time, and so on, as listed above – is a necessary part of the process, but ultimately successful scaffolding depends on the *content* of the verbal exchange which these conditions seek to facilitate. That, we shall suggest, is where effort needs to be no less diligently directed.

- There is a related looseness about the use of the terminology of talk in general and dialogic teaching in particular which reveals itself both in the questionnaires and in the discrepancies in schools' identification of their TLP themes to which we have already alluded (1.8 above). For obvious reasons, it is important that TLP participants achieve a common understanding of the project's key terms and ideas as soon as possible.

2.3 The use of video

There is general agreement that the decision to make video a major tool in the process of refining classroom talk was a sound one. The advisory team, who between them have viewed and discussed video clips involving all of the participating teachers, attest strongly to its impact on teachers' evaluation of their practice, and to its power to sensitise them to what is happening beyond the normal range of their attention in busy classrooms.

Further, the TLP videotapes capture teaching as it is: they record ordinary lessons rather than carefully rehearsed and staged lesson extracts, so they encourage an honesty about the possibilities and limitations of particular approaches which the 'set-piece' extracts in some of the material produced officially or commercially do not allow.

Impact of using video

Teachers reported that the initial videotaping process had made them think more deeply (in order of response frequency) about:

- their dominance of teacher-pupil exchanges;
- the way they ask questions, and in particular about the need to reduce the proportion of closed questions;
- the way they receive children's answers and especially the incidence of habitual repetition of answers;
- the amount of thinking time after questions;
- their facial expressions, gestures and body language.

On the other hand, teachers reported that later videotapes had revealed the following areas of strength and/or improvement (again in order of response frequency):

- children's ability to be thoughtful rather than impulsive, to reflect, to go into greater depth;

¹³ Bruner, J.S. and Haste, H.E. (ed) (1987) *Making Sense: the child's construction of the world*, London: Routledge, pp 1-25; Wood, D., Bruner, J.S., Ross, G. (1976) 'The role of tutoring in problem-solving' *Journal of Child Psychology and Child Psychiatry*, 17, pp 89-100; Maybin, J., Mercer, N., Stierer, B. (1992) ' "Scaffolding" learning in the classroom', in Norman, K. (ed) *Thinking Voices: the work of the National Oracy Project*, London: Hodder, pp 186-95.

- children's ability to listen and concentrate;
- children's oral confidence, and their willingness and capacity to articulate their ideas;
- children's tolerance and respect for each others' ideas, their co-operation, and their preparedness to respond to alternative viewpoints;
- teachers' capacity to frame questions, both open-ended and more sharply focused;
- reduction in teachers' dominance of exchanges and increased preparedness to stand back and allow children's discussion to develop without teacher intervention;
- teachers' acceptance of the importance of thinking time;
- moderation of non-verbal reactions to children's utterances (for example facial expressions which inhibit or unduly steer children's responses): one teacher reported using a mirror to aid this process.

We might view these self-assessments as confirmation of the core dialogic principles of *collectivity*, *reciprocity*, *cumulation*, *support* and *purposefulness* (see Appendix 3).

Technical problems

Because video is central to TLP and has already justified both its inclusion (and the necessary initial expenditure), it is all the more important to sort out the technical problems which many schools have encountered. These have ranged from incompatible or excessively short leads and battery failure to problems of transfer from digital tape to VHS and CD. The latter difficulties stem from the fact that many schools have older video equipment.

However, the most serious problem concerns the quality of sound, and the urgent resolution of this is critical to the project's further development. As has been noted (1.7) the video packs with which schools were provided included three sound systems, each of which works well in some situations but not in others. Most schools appear to have relied on the camera microphone, and as a result have found quiet or distant utterances inaudible. Further, several schools have reported poor audibility from the conference microphone, which is disturbing since if these are indeed proper pressure zone microphones then they should be ideal for use in group work and collective activities such as circle time. Relatively few schools have used the radio microphones, which is the only system which will capture monitoring, or peripatetic classroom exchanges, or paired talk, especially when these compete with a moderate or high level of background noise. They are also ideal as an alternative to conference microphones in group discussion and are certainly the only way that the teacher can monitor and analyse the paired talk which is becoming an increasingly important feature of classroom life. (In these circumstances a child can wear the microphone). However, on the evaluation visits we noted that the systems issued to some of the schools were far from modern, having the cumbersome receivers and heavy – and therefore incompatible – jack plugs of the earlier generation of radio microphone technology.

This is clearly unsatisfactory. In a project which is concerned with talk it is essential that teachers can hear without difficulty what they and children say on the videotapes. Thus, all sound systems should be fully functional and teachers should have the expertise and technical capacity to capitalise on the distinct advantages of each. If the conference microphones are of poor quality they will need to be replaced. Radio microphones must work, and must be able to be connected to the cameras.

Those schools which experienced such problems also felt that the technical training and support could be improved. It is evident that some of these 'problems' were less to do with the technology than with teachers' ability to use it (and some seemed daunted by the radio microphones, which are actually easy to use); but this was certainly aggravated by genuine equipment difficulties, and we recommend that these be reviewed and addressed in time for the start of the autumn term. Having said that, it is not clear from the data available how many of the teachers who experienced technical problems had attended the optional video training sessions in September and October 2002. Checks with County Hall suggest that some who complained of difficulties did not take advantage of the support which was available and to which they were entitled. In such cases the Authority can hardly be held accountable for the problems they encountered.

There are also what one might call 'manpower' problems. Cameras need to be operated, but there are not always people available to do this. Some teachers have videotaped each other, or have used their TAs to do so. Others have involved children in the videotaping. Others for whom these possibilities were not available have compromised by placing the camera on a tripod in a position where it will capture as much as possible.

The video cameras themselves are excellent, though there remains the problem for some schools of transfer from camera to VHS and/or CD which will be resolved as schools upgrade their ICT equipment and software. Not all schools used the tripods, which stabilize the camera, allow smoother panning and generally improve picture quality. On the other hand, some made interesting use of hand-held cameras while working with groups and individuals, with the result that children spoke almost to camera and teachers could then examine not only what they said but how, paralinguistically, they said it.

Using video with other teachers, and with the children themselves

Finally, we can note two powerful spin-offs of the project's use of video to date. First, and expectedly, though in some schools the viewing of tapes has been confined to the TLP teacher(s), link adviser and perhaps the head, in others TLP teachers have viewed and discussed each others' tapes and have even shared them with colleagues who are not involved in the project, thus increasing collective sensitisation to the project's concerns and hastening what must be a longer-term goal of the project, to transform the oral culture of schools rather than single classes.

Second, and potentially no less exciting in its educational implications, some teachers have shown tape extracts to the children. This has provoked children's reflection on, for example: the extent to which they listen to and respect each others' contributions; the sensitive dynamics of balancing the contributions of children who are dominant and confident on the one hand and those who are shy or reticent on the other, and the need for children, no less than teachers, to allow each other time to think.

This latter use of video deserves attention in its own right, for while TLP correctly anticipated the potential of video in *teachers'* development, it may not have foreseen its use as a tool for teaching *children*.

Many teachers reported the shock of first confronting themselves on video, but have now moved beyond this to accept the way they look and sound and concentrate instead on the detail of what they and the children say and how they say it. In this process analytical tools and frameworks are essential. Some teachers have used or adapted documentation from the training days, while others have worked at a more common-sense level. The advantage of both approaches is that it encourages

the sense of professional 'ownership' of TLP and its agenda which is important to the project's success. At the same time, there is a danger of reductionism. We noted analytical frameworks which had picked out some dimensions of talk but ignored others which are no less important, or had reformulated them in ways which misrepresented or diminished their meaning.

These tendencies should be linked to the fact, reported at 2.1 above, that some teachers found the documentation distributed at the three preliminary training days over-complex. Having responded in this way, they may either have dismissed the material as unhelpful or they may have sought to simplify it.

However, dialogic teaching is no longer a novelty, and – as noted above – most teachers in the project seem to be incorporating some of the terminology and practices of dialogic teaching into their professional repertoire, albeit to varying extents and in different ways. It is time, therefore, to revisit the project's core ideas, to look at them afresh in the light of the first year's experience. The danger, otherwise, is that the analytical rigour which they invite will be diluted or, indeed, that at several stages removed from the original material, key ideas will be misunderstood.

There is a case for reviewing not just the adequacy and compatibility of the equipment, but also the technical training and support. It should be noted that classroom videographers need to consider not only technical matters as such but also the question, part-technical and part-educational, of how video can best capture different kinds of classroom talk. If it is difficult for teachers to attend training sessions, then a support pack might be helpful.¹⁴

2.4 Advisory support

There was virtually unanimous endorsement of the contribution of the link advisers. Their support was described, variously, as 'brilliant', 'wonderful', 'excellent', 'reassuring', 'helpful', 'useful' and much more besides. Advisers usually received videotapes in advance and during their visits discussed selected extracts with the TLP teachers, handled any queries, offered suggestions for future development, and followed this up with a written summary of the main points discussed and agreed.

However, many teachers felt that the norm of one visit each term was simply not enough, especially in schools where there was only one TLP teacher, other teachers were not necessarily interested, or where the TLP teacher felt professionally isolated. For these, the link adviser was a lifeline at a time when the novelty and challenge of TLP was competing with the weight of day-to-day responsibilities. (It should be noted that during 2002-3 the advisory service was hit by illness and staff shortages, yet the link advisers nevertheless managed to sustain their commitment to termly visits, and several visited more frequently than that).

Whereas the technical costs of the project are non-recurrent (subject to resolution of the technical problems reported above), advisory costs will not only recur but – even if the project does not extend its number of schools beyond the present 42+6 – will increase well beyond the estimated 140 adviser days for 2002-3 as TLP coverage within each school extends from one or two teachers to the entire staff. However, the longer term goal of TLP must surely be to extend outwards from the existing group of schools to the rest of the county, and the implications for the Authority's advisory staff are therefore considerable.

¹⁴ For those really interested in these matters a TIMSS spinoff, available on the internet, is helpful: Stigler, J.W., Gonzales, P., Kawanaka T., Knoll, S., Serrana, A. (1999) *The TIMSS Videotape Classroom Study: methods and findings from an exploratory research project on eighth-grade mathematics instruction in Germany, Japan and the United States*. Washington: US Department of Education. Available from the National Center for Education Statistics at www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch

On the basis of existing budgets, and given what TLP has already demonstrated about its potential contribution to the national drive to raise standards, increase pupil engagement and make primary education more inclusive,¹⁵ there is a strong case for additional financial support.

One question which needs further exploration is how far all members of the advisory team are working to the same view of dialogic teaching in their dealings with teachers in their link schools. The perceptions of teachers in the schools visited for the evaluation varied considerably, and the questionnaires suggest an even wider range. Teachers are responding selectively to the project's messages and material. Some may be taking ideas which they find persuasive or which accord with their existing views and adapting them, while at the same time discarding other ideas which are in fact no less important. The link advisers, therefore, need to ensure that there is a common understanding of dialogic teaching across all the project schools and that teachers can locate their individual interests and themes within its more comprehensive framework. This issue will become still more critical if the Authority accepts this report's recommendation that the project should move to a more precise mode of analysis and evaluation in 2003-4 so as to enable its impact on pupil engagement and learning to be assessed in a reliable manner.

2.5 Support in the school

TLP has always stressed the need for its work to be properly embedded in school policy. For this reason heads have been invited to accompany their nominated TLP teachers to the training sessions and to participate fully in the project's planning and development.

The questionnaire responses indicate that most heads have maintained this commitment. Several gave a strong lead to the project, in some cases taking responsibility for ensuring its successful implementation. Others were encouraging but less extensively involved. In several of the smaller schools (25% of those which responded) heads teach or co-teach the TLP project class.

The pattern of involvement of other staff has been more variable. In some schools, as reported above, TLP has been treated as a whole-school activity in the sense that it has entailed discussion among all the school's teachers. In some of these, non-TLP staff have watched TLP videotapes and have begun to share the vocabulary and thinking behind the project.

2.6 Obstacles to success

We have noted that a number of schools encountered technical problems with the video kit, or failed to take advantage of the equipment provided, especially the radio microphones. The other main obstacle which teachers noted was the scarcity of time to do justice to the demands of the project, though it was also clear from the schools sampled for the evaluation visits that most teachers were prepared to find time somehow to work on their video material. In this, the four days' cover provided by the Authority should surely have been helpful.

One obstacle which was *not* mentioned, but which was observed during the evaluation visits, was the geography of classrooms. One of the international research findings which appeared to catch many teachers' imagination during the TLP training days concerned the way teachers in some other countries make their classroom layout congruent with - and therefore supportive of - the kind of talk they wish to promote. Tables in rows facing the board signal whole class instruction or exposition; two or three tables pushed together signal collaborative group work; tables in a horseshoe invite and facilitate collective discussion. Some teachers with this kind of awareness regularly change the layout

¹⁵ DfES (2003) *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools*, London: DfES.

to match the different kinds of talk in which they and their pupils engage. In contrast, the prevailing English pattern of tables pushed together signals collaborative group work but is also used for whole class teaching and/or individual work, for neither of which it is really suitable. In fact, the more appropriate all-purpose layout is the horseshoe, because it works for whole class instruction, whole class collective discussion and for individual work, and it can also readily be modified for paired and group discussion. Moreover, bearing in mind this project's purposes, it facilitates dialogue because everyone can see everyone else.

Many TLP teachers have changed their classroom layout in line with these ideas, and a few appear to be prepared to move the furniture quite frequently, but others are for the time being sticking to the traditional group layout.

It has to be noted that many classrooms in English primary schools are by continental and American standards rather small and cramped, and this limits the possibilities for alternative layouts, but as the Ofsted comparative study of the education of six year olds in England, Denmark and Finland shows, this problem can be aggravated by the complexity of the way some teachers arrange the rest of their furniture, with pupil groups and curriculum areas or corners demarcated by bookshelves and cupboards at right angles to the walls competing with each other for the limited space available, and restricting the scope for genuinely collective talk.¹⁶

2.7 Insight and impact

Evaluating the impact of TLP at this early stage is, as was noted in the introduction, a matter for provisional rather than definitive judgements.

That statement needs to be qualified. Broadly speaking, as TLP develops it will be necessary to assess its impact in the following three domains:

- the quality of teaching;
- children's engagement;
- children's learning.

Tentative though we must be, there is already *prima facie* evidence of TLP-related change in the first two areas. Teachers are teaching differently: teachers say so, but comparison between baseline and later videos clearly confirms it, as do the link advisers. (The evidential significance of the baseline and later videotapes adds to the other justifications for the use of video which we noted under 2.3 above). Yet there are several levels at which pedagogical change can be judged and the findings of research on this matter should make us cautious about claiming too much about 'deep structure' change to teaching on the basis either of surface behavioural evidence or teachers' own assessments.¹⁷

Similarly, teachers are reporting changes in children's engagement in their learning tasks and activities (see 2.3 above) and, again, independent evidence from the videotapes and link advisers would seem to confirm this.

¹⁶ Ofsted (2003), *The Education of Six Year Olds in England, Denmark and Finland: an international comparative study*, London: Ofsted, para 85.

¹⁷ For example: Alexander, R.J., Wilcocks, J., Nelson, N. (1996) 'Discourse, pedagogy and the National Curriculum: change and continuity in primary schools', *Research Papers in Education*, 11(1); Galton, M. et al (1999) *Inside the Primary Classroom: 20 years on*, Routledge. Also, in the more specific context of the National Literacy Strategy, see Hardman, F., Smith, F., Wall, K. (2003) ' "Interactive whole class teaching" in the National Literacy Strategy', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(2), pp 197-215; Moyles, J., Hargreaves, L. et al (2003) *Interactive Teaching in the Primary School*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

The advisory team's general assessment is that teachers' *talk* about teaching and learning is certainly changing, but so, to a degree, are teaching and learning themselves. Teachers, they say, are listening as well as talking; and children are talking, not just listening (though they are also listening, but receptively and reflectively rather than submissively). Many teachers, they also say, have begun to grasp the profound importance for children's learning of the Bakhtinian maxim that 'if an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself it falls out of the dialogue'¹⁸ and have sought to give life to it in their handling of classroom interaction.

The advisory team also believe that they have evidence of TLP's impact on pupil engagement. They point to observable changes in pupil behaviour. Because teachers have become more self-conscious in the domain of speaking and listening, so too have pupils. Pupils, they say, are more prepared to speculate, think aloud and make mistakes. The advisers believe that such behaviours are so fundamentally different from what is normally required and permitted in classrooms that they reflect the beginnings of a real shift in the *culture* of learning towards – indeed – one which is more collective, reciprocal, cumulative and supportive and therefore, if the definition is correct, dialogic.

Advisers also point out, however, that if the old routine of closed question, 'correct' answer and uninformative feedback is tough on children who are shy or whose understanding is insecure, then the alternative mode, though more supportive and constructive, is not necessarily easier. Some children are finding the sustained concentration required for discussion and extended dialogue hard work, for this is a mode of learning in which they cannot merely coast, or parrot what they already know, but must really attend and think. And if the teacher shifts from bidding to nomination as the basis for deciding who is to answer questions, then they have no alternative but to listen.

Perhaps the most heartening assessment, which is shared by the advisory team and many teachers and is confirmed by the consultant's independent viewing of TLP videotapes, is that TLP is reaching two groups of children who are frequently disadvantaged by the heavy emphasis on written tasks and/or conventional forms of interaction: the less able, and those quiet, compliant, attention-resisting children 'in the middle' of every class. The less able find, because oral activity is now clearly valued as an end in itself rather than as a prelude to writing, that they can contribute and achieve in a medium in which they have genuine competence. Then, the more they participate, the more they grow in confidence not just in their talking but also in their reading and writing. Those 'in the middle' are drawn into the talk, rather than excluded from it by the dominance of their attention-seeking peers, the competitiveness of bidding, or their fear of giving a 'wrong' answer. At best, then, we are witnessing a shift to a learning culture which is more genuinely *inclusive*.

This has come as an agreeable surprise to some teachers but in fact it is the inevitable consequence of a shift to the principles of collectivity, reciprocity and support in which dialogic teaching is grounded, and inclusivity is very much a feature of the continental teaching which informed this project. Therefore the evidence that these two groups of children are becoming more engaged in classroom talk and are thereby gaining in confidence can be taken as endorsement of the validity of the project's rationale.

Teachers themselves are not making over-ambitious claims about the impact of TLP so far on children's learning, and are concentrating instead on the difference it makes to them and to what they observe of children's engagement. Thus, among the most important insights which they attribute to their involvement in TLP are the following.

- Good talk does not always just happen – it needs to be planned and pondered.

¹⁸ Bakhtin, M.M. (1986) *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p 168.

- Well-founded questioning promotes children's understanding and does not merely test their recall of information.
- Questioning can improve comprehension in reading and writing as well as in talk.
- The quality of children's talk is greatly enhanced if children are given time to think.
- Discussion increases pupil's access to learning.
- Talking before writing helps children to think, and then write, in sentences.
- Shifting the proportion of time in a writing lesson away from the writing itself and towards the talk actually benefits the writing.
- Talk is a powerful tool for raising the confidence of children with special needs and those with low self-esteem.
- Children enjoy and are stimulated by well-structured oral lessons, and they readily adapt to the rather different ground rules which are necessary for such lesson to run smoothly.
- Though the assumption that written work is the only 'real' work is deeply ingrained, children come to appreciate that talk is work too, especially if it requires the kind of self-discipline which is normally associated with written tasks.

The insight here about the relationship between talking and writing is important, and accords with the international evidence from the many countries which value talk more highly than, traditionally, do English schools, and in which the wholly oral lesson, and oral assessment, are very familiar.

If the focus for this first year's assessment of the impact of TLP is on teacher behaviour and pupil engagement rather than on learning outcomes, then this merely reflects a level of caution which is appropriate at this early stage. We repeat: dialogic teaching is a complex and challenging idea and it cannot be expected to lead to overnight transformation; and some teachers did not really get into the project until relatively late in the school year. In future years, the impact on children's learning will need to be tracked more systematically. Meanwhile, since it is abundantly clear that engagement is a precondition for learning, and that good teaching is a precondition for both, we can confidently assert that in those classrooms where TLP is becoming embedded (which is not all of them, by any means, yet) the building blocks for improvements in learning are ready, and some are in place. Further, it is likely that if the Authority had introduced objective measures to assess gains in learning over the year 2002-3, then the evidence would have shown that the heightened pupil engagement which is now evident is beginning to deliver the learning gains to which the project, and EDPII, aspire. In any event, if talk is indeed an object of instruction rather than merely its medium, then in this area at least, learning gains are already apparent.

All this suggests that in 2003-4 TLP will need to put in place more rigorous systems to enable its impact to be properly assessed:

- Participating schools should retain all their 2002-3 videotapes both for their own purposes and for external evaluation.
- They should define the focus of their work within the project with greater precision than in 2002-3, identifying the kind of talk on which they wish to work and the outcomes towards which they

are aiming (the three broad headings at the start of this section – teaching, pupil engagement, pupil learning – provide the starting categories).

- They should make new baseline tapes at the start of the autumn term and thereafter record at regular intervals.
- They should use the analytical frameworks provided during the training days in a systematic way, moving from the concern during 2002-3 with the broad conditions, dynamics and character of talk to examine its *content*. This will entail more close-grained analysis of specific lesson extracts rather than an impressionistic response, using the published dialogic teaching indicators or some comparable framework.
- They should apply this sharper mode of analysis from the outset, so that alongside the baseline *tapes* each participating school has a baseline *assessment*.
- They should add to their analysis a system for recording the progress of themselves and individual children in relation to the objectives identified.
- Both the training sessions for 2003-4 (assuming that finance for these is available) and the programme of the link advisers should offer the necessary material and support to enable the project to progress to this more rigorous second stage.
- It would be sensible to start tracking the progress of Y6 TLP pupils on and after their transfer to Y7 and secondary education, and the addition of the Scarborough group of schools will allow this to be piloted. It is also important to bring more secondary schools into the frame so that K3 teaching can build on what TLP has helped these children achieve at KS2. In as far as the KS3 strategy has a more overt emphasis on talk than do NLS, NNS or the new Primary Strategy, this should be recognised by secondary colleagues as an appropriate and helpful course of action.
- The scope of the annual evaluation, of which this report marks the end of the first stage, will need to be extended. This has manpower and resource implications. It is also desirable to make teachers' own assessments part of the evaluation process.

2.8 The next stage

Respondents to the question 'How do you hope to build on your first year in TLP?' fell into two groups:

- those who wish to refine further the conduct and quality of talk in their own classrooms;
- those who wish to spread the message of TLP beyond their own classrooms.

The first group identified possibilities such as:

- extending the use of video across the curriculum;
- working at children's listening skills;
- refining the quality of questioning;
- moving from pupil-pupil talk to teacher-pupil talk (or *vice versa*);
- making TLP more integral to the teaching of literacy;
- making more frequent but shorter videotapes.

The second group wanted to:

- use the TLP approach with younger children;
- shift the focus from Y5/6 to Y3/4;
- advise other staff about TLP;
- 'cascade' TLP to the rest of the staff;
- incorporate TLP fully into the school's revised curriculum plan.

On these aspirations the following comments might be ventured:

- The sooner TLP becomes a 'whole school' activity in the sense not that all staff talk about it but that all classes enact it, the better are its chances of making a real and long-term difference. This is particularly important because TLP has so far been concentrated mainly in Years 5 and 6. Indeed in some schools where Y6 has been the TLP class, these children shortly leave for secondary school and their teachers will need in effect to start again. Only once a cohort of children versed in the new approaches from reception and Y1 start to move through the school, and encounter in each successive year teaching which reinforces these approaches, will real and lasting transformation at whole school level become possible.
- At the same time, until TLP becomes fully understood and embedded in the work of one class, there are risks in attempting to spread its thinking to other classes. The experience of 'cascade' approaches to professional development and school improvement counsels considerable caution here, especially as dialogic teaching is relatively novel and demanding. Where, to hasten take-up by the rest of a school's staff it is asserted that 'we do this already so there's nothing to worry about' the risks of distortion, dilution and 'innovation without change' are that much greater.
- These two partly conflicting imperatives suggest that the best way forward during 2003-4 is for the initial cohort of TLP teachers to stay with the project and work with their heads and link advisers on a development plan to deepen their understanding of dialogic teaching, consolidate what they have achieved, and move into aspects of teaching as yet undeveloped. Thus if they have concentrated so far on pupil-pupil discussion, they might look next at teacher-pupil whole class teaching. If they have focused on questioning they might now look at discussion. If they have dwelled on just one area of the curriculum they might move to others. And so on. At the same time, the same teachers, with their heads and link advisers, might work together on a plan to extend the reach of the project from one or two classes to the rest of the school, perhaps progressively, a class or two each year, if taking in the entire school seems too ambitious. Ideally, schools should move as soon as practicable to working with a cohort of R or Y1 children whose teaching every year thereafter is in the dialogic mode.
- For both parts of this strategy it seems essential to recognise the risk of dilution, misunderstanding and selectivity in respect of the core terms, ideas and principles of dialogic teaching to which this report has already referred. Countering this requires that all involved go back to first principles, read and engage with what during the first three training days may have seemed daunting and complex (but which now should make perfect sense), and assess their practice against the indicators as initially set out rather than in over-simplified form.
- To support this parallel programme, it is to be hoped that the Authority will be able to extend its programme of training and support, both within the schools and at training days which enable teachers to come out of school, share ideas and experiences, and go into greater depth about the way talk can improve children's engagement and learning.

- This implies that the training days during 2003-4 should shift gear somewhat to a more analytical mode, in which instead of a broad and holistic focus attention should be given to quite specific aspects of talk in relation to learning.
- The notes in section 2.7 about the need to devise proper procedures for assessing the impact of TLP interventions on teaching, engagement and learning are relevant here and provide a possible steer both for the training days and the work of link advisers.

PART III - CONCLUSION

Summary of main findings and (*in italics*) recommendations

1. TLP is a project which addresses educational and professional needs which are of the utmost importance. It is grounded in the cumulative evidence from national and international research, and has the potential to transform the quality of teaching and learning in the schools concerned and to raise standards there in accordance with the objectives of EDPII.
2. The project's modality for its first year combined five training days, advisory support on the basis of a minimum of one day in each project school per term, external consultancy, and the use of video for both professional development and evaluation. The project is managed and monitored by the eight-strong advisory TLP team, headed by the Authority's Chief Adviser.
3. 42 primary schools from the 55 who were originally invited agreed to take part. A further six joined the project towards the end of the year. It is a mark of their belief in the objectives of TLP that the schools have maintained their commitment in the face of other pressures.
4. The estimated cost of the project to date is £205,128 for equipment, training days and up to nine day's supply cover per participating teacher, together with a substantial 'hidden' element for advisory support, which is over and above normal adviser workloads.
5. *TLP is a project whose national as well as local importance is such that it should be properly funded. This will become all the more essential as the project's reach extends to the remaining classes in the 42+ 6 schools and beyond them to other schools in the county, and as the process of evaluating the project's impact on teaching and learning becomes more complex. The Authority should now explore ways of securing such funding, perhaps from external sources.*
6. The training days were generally welcomed by their participants, though some were overwhelmed or confused by the first three days and the associated documentation, and some schools remained unconvinced about the project's value until they started work on their projects. By the end of the first year, however, most such doubts have dissipated and the majority of schools are unequivocal in their enthusiasm for TLP.
7. *In a project whose underlying ideas are somewhat complex and which fundamentally challenge established professional habits, it is understandable that some teachers should initially have been somewhat daunted or confused. This does not, however, justify the 'dumbing down' of those ideas, and there is a strong case for returning to them at regular intervals to ensure that the principles of dialogic teaching are not diluted or distorted. In any case, the portfolio of TLP documentation needs to be re-assessed by the advisory team, in consultation with the schools, and perhaps extended as well as modified. It needs to serve as a permanent point of reference for the processes of planning, analysis and evaluation.*
8. *It is essential that training reaches progressively more deeply into the issues rather than stays at the same level. Next year's training programme could usefully be planned as a whole, and could combine the existing function of 'sharing experiences' with systematic coverage of specific facets of talk, and issues of analysis and evaluation.*
9. A wide variety of individual projects emerged from the initial discussions within schools and between schools and their link advisers. Though projects involve all year groups, the larger proportion of schools are concentrating on Years 5 and/or 6. At the same time, over half are

making the project a 'whole school' venture in that it is discussed by all the staff. Projects deal with different aspects of talk, though the larger proportion are trying to improve children's capacities to engage in discussion. Many teachers claim to be achieving scaffolded dialogue.

10. *As the project progresses, teachers should be encouraged to extend the focus of their work with a view to covering eventually the different contexts and kinds of both teacher and pupil talk across the curriculum as a whole. At the same time, there is a need for greater precision than hitherto in the identification of the specific aspects of talk to be worked on at a given time. Further, where teachers have concentrated on pupil talk they should look at teacher talk too, and vice versa, and it should be understood that well-handled discussion and genuinely scaffolded dialogue require attention to the content as well as the context and dynamics of talk.*
11. The decision to make video technology central to the project has been amply justified. Participating teachers have videotaped aspects of their teaching on an average of five occasions including the baseline recording, and have devoted considerable time to analysing and learning from the results. They have also used videotape to extend awareness of the project to other school staff and to sensitise the children themselves to the importance and effective conduct of speaking and listening. Some technical teething problems remain unresolved, some schools are not making effective use of the radio microphones, and some kinds of talk – notably pupil discussion in groups or pairs – are not being effectively accessed. Not all teachers have taken advantage of the technical training and support provided by the Authority.
12. *Schools needs to check their video equipment without delay to ensure that it – especially the three microphones – work properly and that all systems are mutually compatible, so that the Authority can deal with any remaining problems before the start of next term. Schools could make better use of the technical support and training which the Authority has provided. There is also a case for more advanced training which deals less with basic video use than its application in the particular context of classroom talk, so that – a precondition for this project - all aspects of talk can be effectively accessed.*
13. *The novel use of video in TLP is an area which deserves attention in its own right, and it could be included in any bid for external funding. Again, this has significant national implications.*
14. The support provided by the advisory team has been warmly received by the schools. However, advisers' pressure of other commitments has meant that the scale of their work within their link schools has not always been sufficient to meet specific needs, especially where teachers are working in relative isolation. The demands on the advisory team will become even greater in 2003-4, as TLP extends its reach to other classes and schools, and as its analysis and evaluation become more searching.
15. *The logistics of advisory support for TLP should be reviewed to ensure that the team are able to provide the support which is needed without being overburdened by it. Additional support mechanisms could also be considered – for example school clustering – though at this early stage in the project's development the dangers of dilution and distortion should be guarded against.*
16. Schools identified a number of obstacles to the successful development of TLP of which the most frequent were time and problems with the video equipment. Not noted by respondents, but independently observed, was the tendency of some schools to use classroom layouts which were not really suitable for the kind of talk which they were keen to promote.

17. *Schools could usefully examine how far various contextual factors, notably the use of space and time, support or inhibit the different kinds of talk they wish to promote. Sometimes, of course, such matters are not within their control.*
18. Teachers have identified a large number of gains from their involvement in the project so far, all of them directly relevant to the task of improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards. Moreover, there is clear objective evidence from the link advisers, the videotapes and the evaluation, that many teachers' claims in this regard are justified. The project is exerting a discernible impact in three areas: on the character of teaching, on pupils' motivation and engagement, and on pupils' learning. To date, the initial evidence permits a greater degree of confidence about the first two than the third, though if engagement is a precondition for learning then the project is certainly on course to have a significant impact on learning too. One notable and heartening benefit of the project to date, and an endorsement of its principles and strategies, has been its positive effect on less able children and those who tend normally not to participate in - and therefore benefit from - classroom talk. In this respect, TLP will also contribute to the second domain in the Authority's EDP II, that of inclusion.
19. *It is essential that the Authority and schools should now begin to track the impact of TLP on teaching, engagement and learning in more systematic ways, both at individual school level and at the level of the project as a whole – perhaps, in the latter case, as the next stage of the evaluation. Objectives for each school's project can now be identified with greater precision in 2003-4 than in 2002-3, and work is needed to secure agreement on indicators, record-keeping procedures and modes of evaluation, so that the trajectory of this important project can be reliably followed over the full period of EDPII (2002-7).*
20. *In the light of the comments about inclusion above, the Authority may wish to examine the links between TLP and other parts of EDPII and perhaps to establish dialogue among advisers and teachers involved in the different elements.*
21. Decisions are now needed about the next stage. Schools have set out their provisional intentions and this report has identified a number of broad options for 2003-4.
22. *It is essential that other classes in the TLP schools be brought into the project as soon as is practicable, and in particular that cohorts of children from the Foundation stage onwards should start to experience dialogic teaching and learning in a consistent and incremental manner as they progress from one year or class to the next. Given the project's initial focus on Y5/6, it is also desirable that KS3 teachers be brought into the frame. The addition of the Scarborough group of schools (which includes one secondary school) provides important opportunities in this regard.*
23. *At the same time as encouraging this extension of the project's reach, which might also include other primary schools as well, the Authority will need to be very aware of the dangers of dilution and distortion referred to earlier, and there should be constant reference back to first principles so that the project's momentum is maintained and the quality of classroom talk, and professional discourse about talk, does not regress. A strategy for the remaining period of the project is now needed, which identifies the way other teachers, classes and schools will be brought into the initiative. To some extent this is dependent on funding.*
24. *Moving from working with one or two classes in a school to a whole-school approach in which one year's dialogic teaching builds on that of the previous year will require work by the Authority and TLP schools on the developmental aspects of dialogic teaching, and documentation to provide teachers with appropriate signposts and indicators. At present, the approach does not differentiate age-related needs and strategies.*

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

The Talk for Learning Project as specified in EDPII (2002-3)

Priority 1: Raising attainment in the early years towards the early learning goals and in primary education especially in numeracy and literacy.

Area/Focus of activity: Performance, Teaching and Learning (English: Talk in Teaching and Learning: A New Framework)

Investigate the potential of dialogic talk as a means to enable teachers to deliver even higher levels of attainment, especially for able and more able pupils, in spoken and written language.

Involve Prof. R J Alexander and the National Literacy Strategy, through the Regional Director.

Engage identified teachers in action research which targets classroom discourse and explores the components of organisational frame, pedagogic mode and purpose and discourse form within the teaching and learning context.

Purpose:

To help teachers recognise and value the primacy of talk in the development of communicative and cognitive processes.

To contribute to improving standards in spoken and written language from an already high base and challenge current perceptions of teaching so increasing the proportion of good and very good teaching.

Target groups	Specific Activities for 2002-3	Timing Start/Finish	Resources and Costs	Responsibility	Monitoring	Success criteria
35 high performing large and small schools in urban and rural areas with very good teachers and highly effective leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key members of advisory team to lead action research project in foundation stage and in the primary phase and provide in-school support. 	April 2002	220 Adviser days	Sen. Adv. English Talk for Teaching and Learning Team Chief Adviser	Principal Adviser QA with SEN Adv. Primary checks deployment against need Termly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All schools and settings appraised and regularly informed of Talk for Teaching and Learning Project and understand rationale, objectives and intended outcomes. A minimum of 15 leading teachers from different teaching contexts, are skilled and willing to lead the development of dialogic talk to promote and extend learning across the curriculum in North Yorkshire schools in Phase 2 of the Project (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate to all schools the intentions of the project, the purposes of phase 1, the expected outcomes and how the findings will be developed further. 	April/May 2002	SIN Summer 2002			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify cross section of schools (large, small, rural, urban) where high performance is sustained and there are highly effective teachers (Ofsted Grades 1 and 2) and headteachers (Ofsted V.G) and where there is highly effective teaching but pupils' language is restricting performance 	April/May 2002		Principal Adviser QA and Chief Adviser	Prin. Adv. QA analysis school performance data, Ofsted inspection judgements, & LEA monitoring reports & highly successful schools register.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide 1 day training for HTs and teachers of named schools in understanding the significance of dialogic talk and implications for teaching and learning. 	June 2002	66 supply days and travel and venue costs	Talk for teaching and learning team (TTLT)	Principal Adviser CPD checks training provided	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage identified teachers and schools in principles and practice of action research for exploring the potential of dialogic talk to promote learning and provide training and support. Assign named member of TTLT to each school. Ensure action research pilot gives specific and balanced attention to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organisational frameworks (whole class, group, - collective, collaborative, individualised, individual) Pedagogic modes (direction, instruction, discussion, monitoring) 	June/July 2002 – ongoing	33 supply days, venue and travel costs. HE support costs (RJA)	Talk for Teaching and Learning Team (TTLT)	TTLT check for balanced coverage of all key elements and adjust pilot as necessary (ongoing)	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogic purpose (rote learning, instruction, scaffolding, information sharing, problem solving, supervision, assessment) • Discourse forms (Interrogatory, expository, evaluative) within the contexts of year group, key stage, and mixed age and key stage teaching working with able and more able pupils. • Devise appropriate criteria to assess the effectiveness of talk within learning. • Establish methodologies for teacher-researchers to gather, record and evaluate evidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate project. • Provide web-site and 'chat-room' for researchers to raise issues, share and post findings with each other, key members of Advisory Team, Regional Literacy Director and Prof. Alexander. • Provide regular opportunities for researchers to meet together to renew and evaluate effectiveness of project. • Disseminate the good practice developed to all NYCC schools and settings as project unfolds using 'Good-Practice web-site and through School Improvement Networks. • Evaluate the impact of Phase 1 of the project and use to inform design of Phase 2. Disseminate findings. 	<p>June/July 2002 – July 2002</p> <p>June/July 2002 – July 2002</p> <p>July 2002 – ongoing</p> <p>Half-termly</p> <p>Sept. 2002 – ongoing</p> <p>July 2003 – September 2003</p>	<p>Regional Literacy Director time</p> <p>HE support costs (RJA)</p> <p>10 days supply cover per participating school</p>	<p>Talk for T & L Team with named schools</p> <p>Talk for T & L Team with named schools</p> <p>Sen. Adviser ICT</p> <p>Talk for T & L Team</p> <p>Talk for T & L Team</p> <p>Talk for T & L Team with Link Advisers for named schools</p>	<p>Sen. Adv. Primary and Sen. Adv. English check criteria are effective July 2002</p> <p>TTLT ensure research methodology is robust – July 2002</p> <p>TTLT monitor activity on web-site</p> <p>TTLT ensures meetings are held half-termly</p> <p>Principal Adviser CPD checks development of web-site termly</p> <p>Chief Adviser ensures evaluation is carried out rigorously July - Sept 2003.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplar material available which illustrates how schools are successfully using dialogic talk to support and challenge children working at higher levels in English and other curriculum areas. • Evaluation of Phase 1 of the project yields convincing evidence of improvement in the standards attained by higher achieving pupils in spoken and written language in the case-study schools and in those schools where attainment has plateaued.
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The arrangements for evaluation of the area of focus:

Each teacher researcher supported by a TTLT member will evaluate, using agreed criteria, the different kinds of talk which promote communicative and cognitive processes. They will evaluate the different organisational frameworks employed and the different kinds of talk they allow, the planning of learning tasks and activity, the balance of written and oral assessment and the handling of time and pace on a half termly basis.

Members of the TTLT will reflect on and identify in their attached pilot schools the strategies teachers need to put into operation to promote dialogic talk, and evaluate the impact these have on assisting able and more able pupils to achieve higher levels of attainment in spoken and written language. Prof. Alexander and the Regional Director will provide external evaluation of Year 1 of the project.

Appendix 2

Schools involved in the project and their TLP themes for 2002-3 (as defined by the teachers themselves)

Name of School	Teacher	No of Classes	Age Range Yrs	Area of Curriculum	Aspects of Talk
All Saints Kirkby Overblow	Annie Gregory Trish Shepherd		5/6	PSHCE Philosophy through story books	Whole class discussion. Small group interaction
Arkengarthdale CE	Mary Hutchinson	1 (whole KS)	5/6	Guided reading	Extend questioning, depth of questions, leading onto debates, etc.
Askwith CP	Tracey Ellis Elaine Nayler Don Parker	2	3/4 5/6	Geography English	Pupil → pupil discussion
Athelstan	Kirsty Whelerton	1	10/11	Literacy	To aid vocabulary and writing
Bedale CE Primary	Rachel Davidson Jo Morley	2	5/6	Drama, literacy Numeracy	Reciprocal talk and cumulative dialogue - both extended answers and explanation
Cononley	Mrs G.I.Lofthouse & Y5/6 teacher	1	5/6	Drama	
Crayke CE	Emma Poole	1	5/6	Improving writing through talk including drama	Whole class
Croft CE	Mrs B Higgins Mrs J Huddleston Mr V Irwin	2	9/11 5/7	Literacy Literacy	Debating and discussion skills Communication and speaking in public
Danby CE	Chris Garforth Tim Landers	2	2 & 5/6	Maths/science	Open questioning, developing discussion through scaffolded dialogue. Developing confidence to verbalise thinking to extend responses.
Dishforth Airfield	Vikki Wren Linda Graham	2	2/3 4/5/6	PSHCE	Thinking skills. Philosophy for kids.
Forest of Galtres	Lou O'Brien Marie Willis	2	6 and 5	Numeracy English	Teacher's questioning and the children's discussion (to improve children's reasoning in problem solving in Maths) Discussion and scaffolded dialogue (through role-

Name of School	Teacher	No of Classes	Age Range Yrs	Area of Curriculum	Aspects of Talk
					play) and its impact upon narrative writing.
Giggleswick	Anne Michelmores-Brown	1	4 & 5	Literacy	Paired talk in shared class teaching situation
Hampsthwaite	Cheryl Smith	1	5/6	Literacy	Talk as part of a teaching and learning tool.
Helmsley CP	Shelley Campbell	withdrawal groups of 8 from Y6		Literacy/PHSCE	Developing pupil/pupil interaction and confidence - raising writing standards
Horton in Ribblesdale	Jane Edwards	1	3/4/5	Science - general talk ability	Questions/answers
Husthwaite CE	Helen Heward	1	3/4	Curriculum, breadth/balance (focused in the end on sci, lit, geog, ICT, PSHE)	Pupil to pupil talk in discussion groups (both teacher led groups and pupil only groups)
Hutton Rudby CP	Abigail Birks Richard Chandler Amanda Beanland		1 and 6	Science investigations AT1	Questioning teacher → child
Kildwick	Alan Robertshaw	2	Reception 3	Drama PSHCE	Question and answer teacher talk Pupil talk/discussion
Kirkby in Malhamdale	Richard Wright	1 focus + 2	4/5	Debate	Debate related to topic work focus - hunting. Teacher questioning and pupil - pupil talk.
Kirk Hammerton	C. Millett + A N Other	1	5/6	PSHE	Improve attitudes of Y5 boys (fizzled out as 50% of them left!)
Kirk Smeaton CE	Margaret Bostock	1	5/6	Began as thinking skills but moved to cross/curricular	Scaffolding dialogue - interest in pupils developing skills in ch/ch discussion.
Le Cateau	Barbara Auld	2	2/6	Literacy	Talk for writing, thinking skills, organising thoughts for story writing through scaffolding dialogue
Lothersdale	Sarah Steed	4	R – 6	PSHCE Philosophy circle time	Self-esteem - ability to express feelings and opinions.
Markington CE	Lin Paisley Emma Millee	1	4/5/6	PSHE/citizenship/philosophy	How dialogic talk can extend thinking skills
Nawton CP	Mrs Ives	1	5/6	Science, maths and literacy	Child → child. Range of questions
North Rigton CE	Bev Keen	1	5/6	Literacy	Dev scaffolded discussion about text to enhance creative writing.
Northstead, Scarborough		1	5/6	Literacy	Using dialogic teaching to raise standards in writing
Nun Monkton	Linda Ashby	1		Thinking skills/philosophy	Discussion sequencing
Roecliffe CE	Allison Giles	1	3/4	English	Improving creative writing through role-play
Selby Abbey	Martin Wynne	1	5/6	Science	
South Milford	Lesley Dennon	1	6	Improving writing using some drama if possible	Planning, discussion and evaluation

Name of School	Teacher	No of Classes	Age Range Yrs	Area of Curriculum	Aspects of Talk
St Peters, Scarborough	Sarah Hill	1	5	Role play	Speaking/listening
St Wilfrid's Ripon	Mrs M Drought	1		English	Target children on borders of levels 3/4 4/5.
Sutton in Craven CE	B M Jacques	1	6	Maths	Approach to solving arithmetical problems (no video available as yet - problems)
Sutton Under Whitestonecliffe	Kate McEvoy	1	3-6	PSHCE	Pupil responses
Threshfield	Mrs Helen Jarvis	4 (one being particular focus)	Upper KS2		Teaching children how to have dialogue - cross curricular
West Cliff, Whitby	Janet Bell Bev Stell	1	6	Literacy, writing	Talk for generation development of ideas. Understanding through structured questioning and scaffolded dialogue.
Wistow Parochial	M Brahm K Tissiman	1	5/6	History	Teacher → child Child → child

Notes:

Crakehall. Equipment problems still to be sorted out.

Hampsthwaite. Named head has now moved to another school: this school's participation under review.

Appendix 3

Indicators of dialogic teaching¹⁹

Definition

Dialogic teaching harnesses the power of talk to engage children, stimulate and extend their thinking, and advance their learning and understanding. Not all classroom talk secures these outcomes, and some may even discourage them. Dialogic teaching, therefore, is:

- *collective*: teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class;
- *reciprocal*: teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints;
- *cumulative*: teachers and children build on their own and each others' ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry;
- *supportive*: children articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings;
- *purposeful*: teachers plan and steer classroom talk with specific educational goals in view.

Dialogic and other talk

Most teaching starts by drawing on a basic repertoire of three kinds of classroom talk:

- *rote* (teacher-class): the drilling of facts, ideas and routines through repetition.
- *recitation* (teacher-class or teacher-group): the accumulation of knowledge and understanding through questions designed to test or stimulate recall of what has been previously encountered, or to cue pupils to work out the answer from clues provided in the question.
- *instruction / exposition* (teacher-class, teacher-group or teacher-individual): telling the pupil what to do, and/or imparting information, and/or explaining facts, principles or procedures.

These provide the familiar and traditional bedrock of teaching by direct instruction. Less universally, some teachers, but by no means all, also use:

- *discussion* (teacher-class, teacher-group, pupil-pupil): the exchange of ideas with a view to sharing information and solving problems.
- *scaffolded dialogue* (teacher-class, teacher-group, teacher-pupil, or pupil-pupil): achieving common understanding through structured and cumulative questioning and discussion which guide and prompt, reduce choices, minimise risk and error, and expedite 'handover' of concepts and principles.

The two groups are not mutually exclusive, and we are not arguing that rote, recitation and exposition should be abandoned. All five have their place. Dialogic talk, therefore, is part of the larger oral repertoire which is needed in order that schools may meet the diverse objectives of a broad curriculum, and so that children may be empowered both in their learning now and later as adult members of society.

But talk empowers socially as well as cognitively, and children themselves need to acquire the capacity to:

¹⁹ Taken from Alexander R.J. (2003) *Towards Dialogic Teaching*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Faculty of Education.

- *narrate*
- *explain*
- *instruct*
- *ask different kinds of question*
- *receive, act and build upon answers*
- *analyse and solve problems*
- *speculate and imagine*
- *explore and evaluate ideas*
- *discuss, argue, reason and negotiate*

and, in order that they can do this effectively with others:

- *listen*
- *be receptive to alternative viewpoints*
- *think about what they hear*
- *give others time to think.*

A comprehensive classroom approach to talk for learning and empowerment will need to engage with both of these repertoires.

Indicators

The quality of classroom talk depends on many factors: the speaking and listening skills of children and teachers, teachers' subject knowledge (for taking children's thinking forward requires a clear conceptual map of the directions which that thinking should take), classroom climate, classroom organisation, and so on. The indicators below are placed in two groups. The first group deals with the wider context within which dialogic teaching is placed. The second group lists some of the main properties of the talk which provides the core of dialogic teaching.

Dialogic teaching is facilitated and supported when:

- Different organisational settings and tasks - whole class, collective group, collaborative group, and individual - are deployed to meet different educational goals.
- Teachers are prepared to change classroom layout to meet the requirements of different kinds of learning task and different kinds of learning talk.
- When concentration is required, distractions and interruptions are kept to a minimum.
- Lesson introductions, transitions and conclusions are economically managed, and care is taken to avoid letting lesson episodes (especially writing tasks) extend beyond (a) the time they need, and (b) the children's concentration span.
- Lesson introductions and conclusions are long enough to make a difference, and are, as far as possible, concerned with ideas rather than procedures.
- Tasks are planned with an eye to their potential to provoke and benefit from talk-based as well as text-based and written activities; and 'now let's talk about it' becomes as familiar as 'now let's write about it'.
- Time is viewed as a precious resource and there is close attention to time on task.

- Teaching demonstrates pace in terms of the cognitive ground it enables pupils to cover, not merely in the speed of its organisation or interaction.
- Teachers seek to shift from interactions which are brief and random to those which are longer and more sustained.
- The traditional ratio of written to oral tasks and activities is adjusted to give greater prominence to the latter than hitherto.
- Relatedly, more and better use is made of oral assessment, and teachers become as skilled in assessing children's understanding on the basis of what they say as by checking what they write.
- Teachers are sensitive to the way their expression, gesture, body language, physical stance and location in the classroom can affect the type and quality of classroom talk.
- Teachers work with their pupils to develop: a rich and discriminating vocabulary; the ability to speak confidently, clearly, informatively, expressively and succinctly; the capacity to engage with, and communicate in, different registers and genres; the ability – and will – to listen.
- Teachers recognise that in all aspects of classroom talk they themselves are influential models, and where appropriate they make the modelling process an explicit one.

Dialogic teaching is indicated by:

- *Teacher-pupil interaction (for example in whole class and collective - teacher-led - group settings) in which:*
 - questions are structured so as to provoke thoughtful answers, and - no less important -
 - answers provoke further questions and are seen as the building blocks of dialogue rather than its terminal point;
 - individual teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil exchanges are chained into coherent lines of enquiry rather than left stranded and disconnected;
 - there is an appropriate balance between the social and the cognitive purposes of talk, or between encouraging participation and structuring understanding;
 - pupils – not just teachers - ask questions and provide explanations, and they are encouraged to do so;
 - turns are managed by shared routines rather than through high-stakes competitive (or reluctant) bidding;
 - those who are not speaking at a given time participate no less actively by listening, looking, reflecting and evaluating, and the classroom is arranged so as to encourage this;
 - all parties speak clearly, audibly and expressively;
 - children understand that different school subjects and social circumstances demand different registers, and they learn how to use them;
 - children have the confidence to make mistakes, and understand that mistakes are viewed as something to learn from rather than be ashamed of;
- *Pupil-pupil interaction (for example, in collaborative group settings) in which:*
 - children listen carefully to each other;
 - they encourage each other to participate and share ideas;
 - they build on their own and each others' contributions;
 - they strive to reach common understanding and agreed conclusions, yet
 - they respect minority viewpoints.

- *Teacher-pupil one-to-one monitoring which:*
 - lasts for long enough to make a difference;
 - is instructional rather than merely supervisory;
 - provides diagnostic feedback on which children can build.

- *Questioning (whether in whole class, group or individual interactions) which:*
 - is anchored in the context and content of the lesson;
 - builds on previous knowledge;
 - elicits evidence of children's understanding;
 - appropriately combines invitations for closed / narrow and open / discursive / speculative responses (what is?' and 'what might be?' questions);
 - combines the routine and the probing;
 - uses cued elicitations and leading questions sparingly rather than habitually;
 - prompts and challenges thinking and reasoning;
 - balances open-endedness with guidance and structure in order to reduce the possibility for error;
 - achieves consistency between its form and intent (e.g. where questions are questions rather than instructions, and open questions are genuinely open, rather than invitations to guess the one 'right' answer).

- *Responses to questioning which:*
 - address the question in the depth it invites rather than worry about spotting the 'correct' answer;
 - move beyond yes/no or simple recall to extended answers involving reasoning, hypothesising and 'thinking aloud';
 - are, where appropriate, considered and discursive rather than brief and prematurely curtailed.

- *Feedback on responses which:*
 - replaces the monosyllabically positive, negative or non-committal judgement (e.g. repeating the respondent's answer) by focused and informative diagnostic feedback on which pupils can build;
 - uses praise discriminatingly and appropriately, and filters out the merely phatic 'wow', 'fantastic', 'good boy', 'good girl', 'very good', 'excellent' etc;
 - keeps lines of enquiry open rather than closes them down;
 - encourages children to articulate their ideas openly and confidently, without fear of embarrassment or retribution if they are wrong.

- *Pupil talk through which children:*
 - narrate
 - explain
 - instruct
 - ask different kinds of question
 - receive, act and build upon answers
 - analyse and solve problems
 - speculate and imagine
 - explore and evaluate ideas
 - discuss
 - argue, reason and justify
 - negotiate.

Appendix 4

Evaluation questionnaire for participating schools, June 2003

North Yorkshire County Council

TALK FOR LEARNING PROJECT INTERIM EVALUATION, YEAR 1, 2002-3

The Authority is expected to report annually on the progress of the Talk for Learning Project (TLP). It is also essential that all of us who are involved in the project gain a sense of how it is evolving so that we can learn from our individual and collective experiences in order to bring about the lasting improvements in classroom talk and children's learning to which TLP is directed.

This first year has been an uneven one and many schools did not get going on TLP until quite late, so it is too soon to be expecting widespread change. With that in mind, the first year's evaluation is largely a fact-finding exercise. The Authority is providing the evaluator (Professor Robin Alexander of Cambridge University) with facts and figures about the project, and to supplement these he is gathering independent feedback from three main sources: (i) visits to a sample of schools which between them reflect some of the different approaches which have emerged; (ii) meetings with the advisory team responsible for overseeing the project; (iii) this questionnaire which is being sent to all the schools involved.

*Robin Alexander hopes to be able to report back on the evaluation at the Boroughbridge conference on 9 July. In order to make that possible, would you please return this questionnaire, completed, to reach **Mandy Lambert, Advisory Services Unit, Education Directorate, County Hall, Northallerton, DL7 8AE, by no later than Thursday 26 June.** The report will respect the anonymity of all schools and teachers. Many thanks for your help.*

School context

1. Name of school:
2. How many classes are involved in the Talk for Learning Project (TLP) in your school?
3. Year group(s) involved in TLP: (circle) R Y1 Y2 Y3 Y4 Y5 Y6
4. Is TLP being treated as a whole-school development activity? (Circle) Yes / No
5. What is the head's role in TLP?

Focus

6. Subject(s) / curriculum area(s) chosen for TLP:
7. Organisational context chosen for TLP (e.g. whole class, group work):
8. Specific aspect(s) of classroom talk on which you are working (e.g. questioning, feedback, discussion):
9. Why did you choose these?

Video

10. When did you make the first (baseline) TLP videotape in your classroom? (Date)
11. Date(s) where applicable of any subsequent TLP videotapes:
12. What technical or other problems – if any – did you encounter in making the tapes?
13. Have you solved them?

14. What strengths in your teaching has videotape revealed or confirmed?
15. What aspects of your teaching has videotape made you less happy with?
16. Have you tried to tackle the latter, and if so, by what means?
17. If you have made more than one videotape, what main differences have you noted in the quality of classroom practice in your chosen TLP focus area between the first tape and the most recent one?

Talk for teaching and learning

18. What are the most significant insights into the role of talk in teaching and learning which have you gained from your involvement in TLP so far?
19. How far has the teaching of other colleagues in your school benefited from your involvement in TLP?

Support

The Authority and schools have supported TLP in a variety of ways. Comment, if you wish, on the various forms of support.

20. Video kit:
21. Documentation:
22. Conferences and training days:
23. Link adviser:
24. School:
25. Other:

Obstacles to success

26. If you feel that your participation in TLP, and the benefits gained, have been *less* than you would have liked, what has caused this? (Answer only if applicable)

Next year

27. How do you hope to build on your first year in TLP?

Other comments

28. If there is anything you would like to add, please do so here and/or overpage.

Appendix 5

Schools visited by the consultant as part of the 2002-3 evaluation

Thursday 19 June

Morning: South Milford Primary School

Afternoon: Markington CE Primary School

Friday 20 June

Morning: Forest of Galtres Primary School, Shipton-by-Beningbrough

Afternoon: Kirk Smeaton CE Primary School

Thursday 26 June

Morning: Kirkby Overblow, All Saints CE Primary School

Afternoon: Askwith Primary School

Friday 27 June

Morning: Hutton Rudby Primary School

Afternoon: Danby CE Primary School