DIALOGIC TEACHING IN BRIEF

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Dialogic teaching, as developed by the author and trialled in the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Dialogic Teaching Project, is distinctive in its principles, focus and strategy; yet it also is grounded in the wider corpus of research on talk in learning and teaching and therefore has a familial relationship to some other approaches to which the label 'dialogic' is applied.

That research has a number of strands - psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, neuroscientific, philosophical, pedagogical - but in this context three are pre-eminent. First, psychological evidence, increasingly supported by neuroscience, demonstrates the intimate and necessary relationship between language and thought, and the power of spoken language to enable, support and enhance children's cognitive development, especially during the early and primary years (for example, Bruner, 1983, 1987, 1996; Tough, 1977; Wood, 1976, 1998; Goswami, 2015). Second, classroom research testifies to the way that the recitation or IRE (initiation-response-evaluation) mode of teaching, which centres on closed questions, recall answers and minimal feedback and is the Anglo-American and possibly international default, remains strongly resistant to change, despite evidence that it is essentially wasteful of talk's true cognitive and educational potential (Barnes, 1969, 1976; Cazden, 2001; Nystrand, 1997; Alexander, 2001, 2008; Mortimer and Scott, 2003; Hardman *et al,* 2003; Smith, Hardman *et al*, 2004, Galton *et al*, 1999, Resnick *et al* 2015). Third, various approaches have been devised to address the problem.

Though sharing a commitment to raising the profile and power of classroom talk, and though they are often grouped under the umbrella terms 'dialogue' and 'dialogic', these emerging approaches to talk reform are far from identical. Some focus largely or exclusively on the teacher's talk (e.g. Wragg and Brown 1993, 2001) and some on the pupil's (e.g. Mercer, 2000; Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif, 2004, and those approaches and packages that deal with the pupil's oracy development *per se* rather than teacher-pupil interaction more broadly). Others, including Alexander's work, attend to both, arguing that although pupil talk must be our ultimate preoccupation because of its role in the development of thinking, learning and understanding, it is largely through the teacher's talk that the pupil's talk is encouraged, facilitated, mediated, probed and extended - or, in too many classrooms, inhibited. Hence the effort, to which all interested in dialogic pedagogy subscribe, to move beyond the essentially monologic and teacher-centred dominance of recitation/IRE and develop patterns of classroom interaction that open up the talk, and hence the thinking, of the pupil.

In differentiating the various pedagogical approaches Lefstein and Snell (2014) show how they vary not just in respect of strategy but also by reflecting contrasting notions of dialogue's nature and purposes, whether these be the perennial interplay of voices in culture and history (Bakhtin), the dialectic of argumentation and critique (Socrates), collaborative thinking as a route to acculturation as well as learning (Vygotsky), the nurturing of human relations (Buber) or human and social empowerment (Freire). In parallel, Alexander (2001, 2008) draws on his transnational and cross-cultural classroom research in England, Denmark, Finland, France, India, Russia and the United States to show how classroom talk is shaped by distinct, culturally-embedded stances on teaching, which he differentiates as 'transmission', 'initiation', 'negotiation', 'facilitation' and 'acceleration', and on collective, communitarian and individualist accounts of social relations.

Given this diverse cultural and philosophical genealogy, it is inevitable that strategies for talk reform may have markedly different emphases, and here, again, the framework of Lefstein and Snell (2014) is helpful. They identify four paradigmatic approaches: dialogically organised instruction (Nystrand,

1997, 2006), exploratory talk (Mercer 2000, Mercer and Littleton, 2007), accountable talk (Resnick, Michaels and O'Connor, 2010) and dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2001, 2008, 2017).

In turn, Alexander's take on dialogic teaching owes most to the foundational works of Vygotsky (1962, 1978), Bruner (1983, 1996) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) while strategically it is closest to those of Nystrand and Resnick, Michaels and O'Connor (*op cit*). Yet it is also *sui generis*. As noted above, it devotes equal attention to the quality of teacher and pupil talk, and to the agency of others - fellow pupils as well as teachers - in the latter. But unlike several other approaches it eschews the view that there is one right way to maximise the power of classroom talk (small group discussion or 'interactive' whole class teaching, for example) and instead advances the need for every teacher to develop a broad repertoire of talk-based pedagogical skills and strategies and to draw on these to expand and refine the talk repertoires and capacities of their pupils. Acknowledging the uniqueness of classroom personalities and circumstances it gives the teacher the responsibility for deciding how the repertoire should be applied.

This notion of repertoire combined with teacher agency is fundamental. It reaches back to Alexander's contribution to the UK government's 'three wise men' enquiry of 1991-2 which made a similar case for repertoire-based teaching (Alexander *et al,* 1992), and opposed the either/or, them-and-us, dichotomising tendency in the wider educational and pedagogical discourse - an argument that Alexander first advanced in the 1980s (Alexander 1984) and returned to in his paper 'Beyond dichotomous pedagogies' for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) (Alexander 2008, chapter 4).

The four basic repertoires in the dialogic teaching framework (Alexander 2017, 37-40) are:

• For teachers: organisational settings for talk (five categories)
• For teachers and pupils: talk for everyday life (six categories)
• For teachers: teaching talk (five categories)
• For pupils: learning talk (eleven categories and four conditions)

To these are added, in the Education Endowment Foundation project, two subsets of the teacher talk repertoire (Alexander 2015, 46-7):

• Questioning (eight categories)
• Helping pupils to expand, build on and learn from their contributions (nine moves derived from Michaels and O'Connor, 2012)

What underlines the repertoire principle is that although teaching talk prioritises discussion and dialogue, it also includes rote, recitation, instruction and exposition, arguing that even though teaching restricted to these may be less productive, they too have their place.

Beyond the element of repertoire is a set of 61 indicators through which teachers can plan and review their practice, and five core principles (collectivity, reciprocity, cumulation, support, purposefulness) by which the dialogic properties of talk are judged (Alexander 2017a, 40-44).

The ultimate test of genuinely dialogic teaching is captured in two quotations frequently cited by Alexander: 'What counts is the extent to which instruction requires students to think, not just to report someone else's thinking' (Nystrand *et al* 1997, 72), and 'If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue' (Bakhtin 1986, 168). Here, Nystrand reminds us that while classroom talk is inevitably and properly about communicative facility and effectiveness, if its impact is not primarily *cognitive* then the prospects for learning - and indeed the value of what is communicated - are greatly diminished. Shifting from the efficacy of exchanges to their component

moves, Bakhtin's sense of dialogue as an unending process or quest argues a shift in the centre of discursive gravity from what the teacher asks, instructs or tells - the pre-eminent focus of traditional classroom observation instruments - to what the pupil says and, especially, what the teacher *does* with what the pupil says.

Although it is correct to say that until the CPRT/IEE Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) project on dialogic teaching, directed 2014-17 by Robin Alexander and Frank Hardman, there had been no randomised control trial of this particular approach, evaluations of its precursors in London and North Yorkshire, using different methods, were undertaken and with broadly positive outcomes (Alexander, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). Further, once Alexander's approach to dialogic teaching is located within the broader family of talk reform approaches with which it has most in common (see above), we find abundant international evidence, including from randomised control trials, that dialogue makes a difference. Hattie's synthesis of 800 meta-analyses relating to pupil attainment shows that the biggest effect sizes available by the mid 2000s related to teaching strategies - all strategies, not just those that are talk-based - in which the quality of talk is paramount: reciprocal teaching, feedback and student self-verbalisation, for example (Hattie, 2009). Subsequently, many of the key studies of classroom talk and their initiators/authors were represented in 2011 at a conference held in Pittsburgh under the auspices of AERA, and the resulting research compendium reported that students who had experienced dialogic teaching broadly defined 'performed better on standardised tests than those in control groups, retained their learned knowledge for longer, and more effectively transferred their knowledge and understanding from one subject to another' (Resnick, Asterhan and Clarke, 2015, 1).

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For information about the EEF dialogic teaching project: http://cprtrust.org.uk/research/classroom-talk/ and https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/our-work/projects/improving-talk-for-teaching-and-learning .

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