



# **Talking, Listening and Learning**

## **in**

# **Inverclyde**

## Contents

---

1. Acknowledgements
2. Foreword
3. Introduction and Project Overview
4. Beginnings
5. Learning in Groups
6. Questioning
7. Building Ideas
8. Reflecting
9. Sample Lessons
10. Towards Excellence
11. Sample Policy Statement
12. Evaluation Report
13. Further Resources



## Acknowledgements



## Acknowledgements

---

This resource outlines some of the ideas generated by the *Talking, Listening and Learning* team:

Kathleen Ballantyne, Kareen McDowall	Ardgowan Primary School
Mary Theresa Burrows	Glenburn School
Jess Todd	Moorfoot Primary School
Marion Macleod	Highlander's Gaelic Unit/ Milton of Buchanan Primary School
Paula Devlin Pamela Osbourne Jan Cannon	Overton Primary School
Janice Johnstone Jackie Mills	Ravenscraig Primary School
Julie Docherty Kirsteen Docherty Lynne Gillan Gillian Deveney	Sacred Heart Primary School
Bernadette Clark	St John's primary School
Sandra Eaglestone	Wemyss Bay primary/ Earnhill Primary:
Jess Carroll	Development Officer
Fiona Norris	Quality Improvement Officer

Thanks to the head teachers of these schools for their continuing support, and of course to all of their pupils, for their enthusiasm and insight.

Thanks also to Kathy Fiddes, for her expertise and encouragement; to our evaluation team, Brian Boyd and John Lawson for their support; and to Kate Boyd and Liz Ruddy, who came with us on the journey that began the journey.



## Foreword



## Foreword

---

**Ian Fraser**

**Corporate Director of Education & Social Care**

**Inverclyde Council**

We are moving forward in a coherent direction in Inverclyde. Our direction statement says that we are 'Building Inverclyde through Excellence, Ambition and Regeneration'. It is really important that all of our young people, all of our children and all of our adults who are involved in learning have a good base in literacy. Literacy regenerates Inverclyde, literacy delivers ambition for our people and literacy makes our schools and establishments excellent.

We have transferred the aims which are traditionally educational into ensuring that the Corporate Objectives and Priorities of the Council are met. By developing literacy we promote our Corporate aims: lifelong learning and economic development and health, wellbeing and active citizenship. We have also worked with external partners in ensuring that the thematic groups of the Community Plan can ensure a unified development in literacy.

Given this background to developments in Inverclyde, I am happy to introduce 'Talking Round Corners'. I have great confidence that the project will improve the role of the talking, listening and learning process. I have spoken to teachers who have been involved in the pilot and I'm sure that teachers within Inverclyde will become more confident in using classroom talk. I am also sure that the good practice that exists in talking and listening will be further developed and widely shared. I like the methodology behind the project which is built on the key principles of dialogic teaching. This is an approach which harmonises with national curriculum developments under a Curriculum for Excellence and other initiatives including Assessment is for Learning and Determined to Succeed.

I would also express my pleasure at the comprehensive evaluation report by Professor Brian Boyd and John Lawson of Strathclyde University. I am particularly pleased that the rationale behind the project is recognised and the indicators for wide dissemination are well founded. I look forward to seeing evidence of dialogic teaching in many schools in Inverclyde and hearing positive messages about its impact on the learning of children and young people.



# Introduction and Overview





## Background

In the Autumn of 2004, about six months after I arrived in Inverclyde, I delivered a number of CPD sessions to a total of around 120 teachers on ideas for developing talking and listening in the classroom. At the end of each session I asked groups of teachers to come up with a few questions about aspects of classroom talk about which they were still uncertain and with which they'd like some further help. Having congratulated myself that my sessions had been useful and reasonably comprehensive, I expected one or two questions from each of the seven sessions, which I might use to offer a little more help and advice to a few teachers. I was completely unprepared for the flood of questions which followed:

- How do we stop the same people answering all the time?
- How do I encourage a reluctant speaker?
- How do I find time to give each child time to elaborate properly?
- How do I help a child with a short concentration span to improve his concentration?
- How do we get the proper balance of teacher/pupil input?
- How do you assess understanding?
- How do we teach pupils to listen better?
- How do I control inappropriate responses?
- How can groups be focused and not digress?
- How can children learn to show respect and value each other's opinions?
- Do we talk enough?
- How do we help children to verbalise their understanding?
- Listening - how do you provide opportunities for teaching explicit skills?
- How can we build confidence?
- How do you end a discussion?
- How do I teach group discussion skills?
- How do I find the time?

I stopped counting at 81. Clearly, many teachers felt that they lacked the skills and confidence in this vital area of learning. Something had to be done. So, working on the principle that no-one is as clever as everyone, I did what most education officers do in this circumstance - I formed a steering group.

We certainly had a local mandate, but on the understanding that educational change should be linked to national as well as local research, the steering group, which consisted of teachers and head teachers, looked around. We read, and discussed practice from other authorities and from other countries. The AIFL programme, underpinned by the research of Dylan Wiliam and Paul Black, had begun to make inroads in Inverclyde and we wanted to ensure that our work would dovetail with it. This led us to the work of Professor Robin Alexander and his research on dialogic teaching, which coincidentally was being used by a project in North Yorkshire. Four of us visited them and found enough of interest to convince us that Alexander's work would be a useful foundation for our project, although we subsequently also drew on the work of the guru of thinking skills, Robert Fisher. The working title of our project, despite being somewhat cumbersome, was chosen because we wanted to emphasise that this was not to be a tick-box exercise, but was to be about developing authentic talking and listening. And so Talking, Listening and Learning in Inverclyde (TLL) was born.



## The aims of the project

---

One of our key ideas was that this project was not to be presented as yet another 'initiative', to teachers reeling under the weight of a raft of initiatives. Rather, it was to be a refreshing of practice, building on the good that was already there by considering some unfamiliar ideas and trying them out in the classroom. The project would reinforce the importance of talking and listening to pupils' enjoyment of learning. It would make connections, not only to AIFL, but also to citizenship and enterprise, thinking skills and philosophical enquiry, and to the emerging 'excellence' agenda. Since effective communication underpins all of the key purposes of the 3-18 curriculum, the project would help teachers to develop vital cross-cutting skills. Although we were undeniably working on an aspect of language, it was about language for learning. The three overarching aims were kept as jargon free as possible:

*As teachers and learners we hope to:*

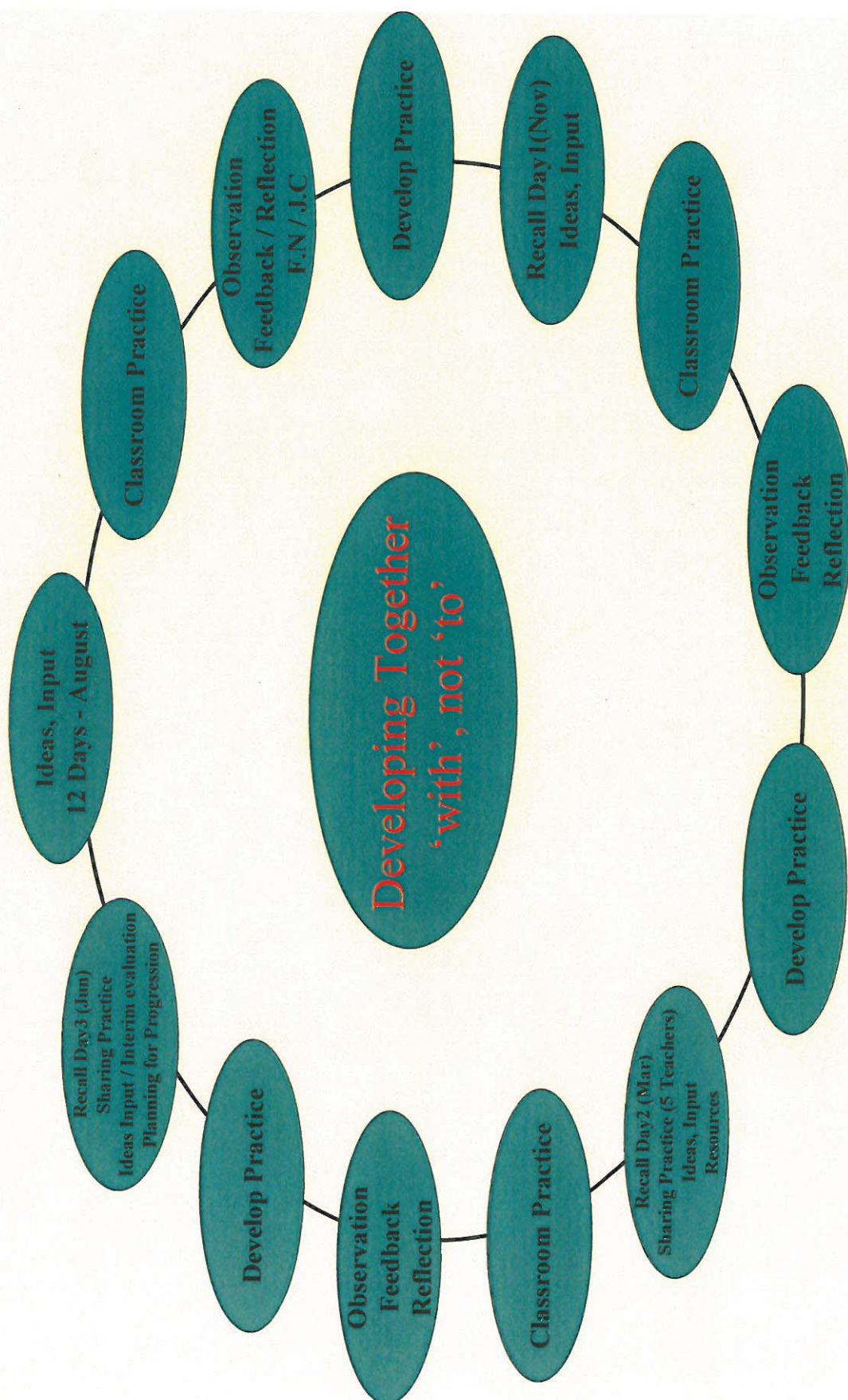
- 1 *improve our understanding of the role of talking and listening in the learning process*
  - 1 *become more confident in using classroom talk*
  - 1 *develop and share good practice in talking and listening*
- 

## The strategy

A key part of our approach was that the teachers who were a part of it would not simply be the recipients of knowledge, but would themselves grow new practice: they would become developers, rather than merely the 'developed'. So it was important that they were willing participants, rather than conscripts. Eventually a group of fourteen teachers, from 9 schools - including the Gaelic Unit and a special school - became our core group, with classes from P1- P7. The project was designed to run for two years, from August 2005, and was to be evaluated by a team of two from Strathclyde University, Professor Brian Boyd and John Lawson, both of whom had a strong track record in collaborative learning. As the development model for year one demonstrates (over) there was to be a cumulative effect; a gradual accretion of confidence and ideas within a community of learners, both teachers and pupils, who were aware from the beginning that they were part of something new, and that their input was important.



## TALKING, LISTENING, LEARNING, YEAR 1 *Development Model*





## The key principles of dialogic teaching

This resource includes a copy of Robin Alexander's *Towards Dialogic Teaching*. It would be pointless to repeat what Professor Alexander explains so clearly in his booklet. However, it is worth highlighting the key principles of the approach, since they have informed the work of our project.

Dialogic teaching is:

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

## Developing practice

From the beginning of the project, we used an 'umbrella' approach: that is, using these common principles, and with shared input, teachers and young people explored a number of strategies for developing good talking and listening practices. Teachers made the decisions about where to start and when to move on, based on their own judgement and supported by feedback from members of the team who had shared their work in the classroom. It was about growing practice, rather than enforcing it. Consequently, a range of learning activities has been taking place in classrooms, including:

- Establishing rules and routines for effective discussion
- Thinking hands/listening bodies
- Varying groups sizes within the lesson
- Talking partners
- Shared leadership of discussion
- The use of Bloom's Taxonomy flip-cards to discuss question types
- Teachers using answers to build ideas and deepen dialogue
- Pupils formulating questions
- Pupils analysing the quality of talking and listening within the lesson
- Teachers stepping back and allowing pupils to mediate discussion
- Pupils negotiating/evaluating/reaching consensus
- Pupils chaining ideas into coherent lines of enquiry

A crucial and very powerful aspect of the project has been the impact of teachers sharing practice. An example of this is what Professor Robert Fisher helped christen as *Talk Gym*. Beginning with the 'no hands up' strategy of AIFL, pupils and teachers have developed a series of hand signals to demonstrate their readiness to think, to speak and to control the direction of the discussion. These hand signals have become very popular with virtually all teachers and pupils in the project; pupils have been using these hand signals spontaneously, in situations outside their project classrooms, a phenomenon that could hardly have been imagined at the outset of the work. In fact, the title of this resource pack was given to us by a pupil reflecting on the usefulness of the talk gym gestures:

*"When the teacher asks a question and you put your hand up, someone gets picked and they say their answer. When you discuss it with your thumbs it goes in all different directions and you really think about it and understand it better. It's like talking round corners".*



## Using this resource

'Talking Round Corners' represents the first two parts of a threefold approach to supporting classroom practice. In this resource you will find some of the key ideas of the work of the project, both in the written sections of this folder, and in the accompanying DVD. These are designed to be indicative, rather than definitive: the written materials contain a brief summary of the key areas and practices which emerged from the work of the project, and the DVD short excerpts from lessons. But they will allow you to sample the work of the project teachers and to think about your own practice in relation to what you read and see. However, the real impact will come from your discussion of these ideas with colleagues, and from the subsequent experimental changes you make to your classroom practice. Working towards excellence in using classroom talk to develop learning will take time; it is a process, rather than an event.

In order to support this process of change and development, CPD sessions will run throughout this year. You will see that these sessions are clearly linked to the sections in this pack. The sessions are designed to clarify the key ideas and to provide further opportunity for professional reflection with colleagues.

In addition to the key ideas of the project, this pack contains some lesson plans from the classrooms of the project teachers. Throughout the duration of the project, teachers were asked to make a brief record of some of their lessons, and to record their thoughts about how the lesson had gone, and what they thought their next steps were. They are, then, a record of the journey they have made, and we include some of them here for you to use in whatever way you find most helpful.

Also included in the pack is the very comprehensive evaluation report by Professor Brian Boyd and John Lawson, of Strathclyde University. The report is very positive about the work of the project and grounds our practice in wider research. As such it is part of our rationale for further disseminating these ideas, as well as being a very valuable aid to professional reflection. I hope you will find time to read it.

I had also intended to link our work to the Curriculum for Excellence outcomes and experiences for English language and literacy; however, at the time of going to print they were not available. When they are released, a representative group of us will consider how this practice sits within that framework, and a summary of our thoughts will be sent to you to include in your folder.

Finally, I began this introduction by referring to some of the questions you had raised about talking and listening, almost three years ago. The work of the project and this package - written materials, DVD and CPD sessions - are an attempt to answer at least some of those questions. I hope you find that they do.

Fiona Norris, August 2007



# Beginnings



## Beginnings

### Robin Alexander identifies five kinds of teaching talk:

- **Rote** (teacher-class): the drilling of facts, ideas and routines through recitation
- **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 help pupils work out the answer from clues provided in the question
- **Exposition/Instruction** (teacher-class, teacher-group or teacher -individual) imparting information and/or explaining facts, principles or procedures, telling the pupil what to do.
- **Discussion** (teacher-class, teacher-group, pupil-pupil): the exchange of ideas with a view to sharing information, solving problems or making collective decisions
- **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.

Since we know that the latter two, discussion and scaffolded dialogue, tend to be the most powerful in advancing learning, we decided to focus mostly on these two in the project classrooms. It quickly became apparent to all project teachers that in order for good discussion to happen, rules and routines to facilitate good discussion had to be established and reinforced regularly until they had become second nature to pupils. Those teachers who had not done this at the outset, found themselves backtracking to do so, when they realised that the lack of a common code meant that discussions sometimes dissipated and even disintegrated.

The most effective practice is to allow the class to decide their own rules to guide their behaviour during class and group discussion, since that means that they have to think about why they need them, in itself a good opportunity for pupils to begin to explore the place of talking and listening in their learning. The rules can then be made for example, into a poster with drawings or photographs which will act as an aide-memoir for pupils. Project teachers working in the early stages, P1-P3, found it useful to further reinforce the ideas behind these rules with a matching set of gestures, particularly with a difficult rule such as '*We give reasons to explain our ideas,*' where the adoption of a stretching gesture helps pupils to develop an understanding that what they are doing is extending the discussion.



In addition to the visual prompt of the poster, some teachers also found it useful to explore the concept of listening, for example, using **T-charts** and **Y-charts**, which again help to 'draw a picture' of the idea. (See over)

As with any other teaching aid, whatever you produce should not simply become wallpaper, but should be used to focus pupils' attention on the key ideas, until you feel that they have reached the stage where you need only refer to it now and again. However, this may take some time.

As soon as you introduce rules, you are of course introducing a **vocabulary** for talk - 'speak', 'share', 'think', 'eye-contact' 'agree/disagree' for example, are some of the basic building blocks. In your dialogue with individual pupils and in leading class discussion you will of course be modelling good practice in using language to question, to explore, to justify and to persuade, for example. But at some point - and as a professional you will know when that point has been reached - you will need to add formally to these basic words, in order to increase cognitive challenge, to help pupils manage discussion better and to reflect on their experiences.

**As a starter for ten, you might want to consider adding some of these:**

*Opinion   Agreement   Relevant   Argument   Assertion   Alternatives*

*Challenge   Reason   Explain   Dialogue   Convince   Persuade   Digress*

And at some point, you will want to discuss with the class strategies for disagreeing without falling out; and for persuading without trying to bully. You might then want to introduce some helpful phrases, which will enable pupils to present their case in a non-threatening manner. For example:

*I can understand that.... we could look at it this way.... In my opinion....*

*Perhaps we could consider..... I agree with a lot of what you say, but....*

*To sort this out we could.... Maybe we could discuss... on the other hand...*

An enjoyable lesson would be to introduce one or two of these, and then ask groups of pupils to come up with not only more good 'persuasive' words and phrases, but their opposite - words which anger, inflame and impede open discussion.

## **DVD LINK:** Revision of rules for group Discussion in P1, P3 and P6

### **Questions for professional reflection:**

- Do you have a clear set of rules for class and group discussion  
Which pupils have helped to generate, and which they understand?
- Do you reinforce these frequently and systematically?
- Do you teach them to use the language of effective disagreement and persuasion?

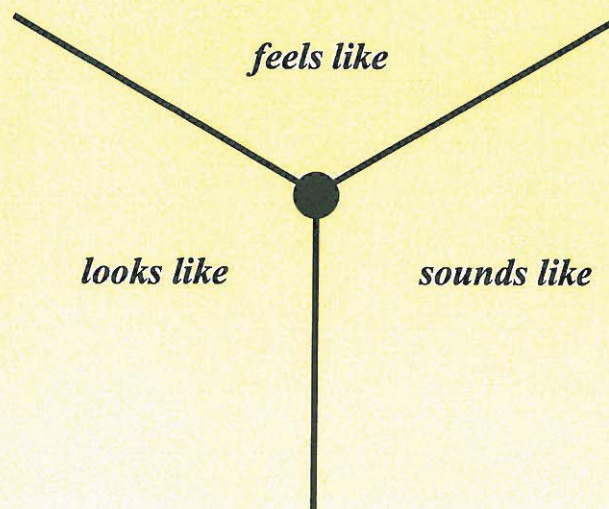


## Effective Listening

<i>Looks Like</i>	<i>Sounds like</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Head nodding</i></li> <li>• <i>Eye Contact</i></li> <li>• <i>Showing with my face that I'm interested in what the speaker is telling me</i></li> <li>• <i>Concentrating</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Only one voice speaking</i></li> <li>• <i>Words like yes, mmm, and that's interesting to support the speaker</i></li> <li>• <i>Polite language</i></li> <li>• <i>Quiet voices</i></li> </ul>

## Y Charts

Y Charts are an extension of T Charts





## Talking and Listening Rules for Learning

Primary 1 and 2



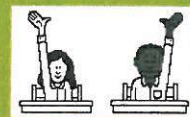
We speak one at a time.



Good eye contact



We do not interrupt.



We share our ideas.



We think about what we hear.



We give reasons to explain our ideas.



We listen carefully.



If we don't understand ,we ask 'Why?'





## Talk Gym

**'Thinking has to be learned in the way dancing has to be learned'**

Nietzsche

A curious thing happened when we started thinking together. Teachers and pupils established that during group discussion, readiness to speak would be indicated by **raising thumbs**, not hands - an idea which had been widely circulated in AIFL. Pupils understood that putting your hand up during group discussion was very intrusive, almost like shouting, and that this quiet gesture was much more effective.

However, once pupils began to think about using their bodies to communicate, they suggested other ideas for making discussion more effective. Having considered the importance of thinking before speaking, a **closed fist** gesture was adopted to signify thinking; and so a useful sequence was created: thinking fist, and when a relevant idea occurs, thumbs pop up.

This has the obvious effect of demonstrating that thinking is **active**, and that even when you are not speaking, you are still doing something - you are thinking, and frequently you are **listening**. Because hands were being used to indicate thinking/speaking processes, it was a small step for pupils to understand that they could not stop thinking before the speaker had finished speaking; that thumbs could not pop up until the speaker had concluded. This immediately helps to counter the problem of pupils not listening, because they have already decided what they want to say. And not only pupils - how many adults do you know who constantly interrupt the flow of someone's communication because they just have to get their point of view across....?

But it didn't stop there. One of the fundamental aims of the project was that we would get to the stage where pupils would be able to mediate effective group discussion themselves, without the teacher having to lead. Once again, the solution came from pupils. When the speaker concluded, she would look round the group for someone with thumbs up, and then with an **open-handed gesture** she would 'pass' the discussion on. This gesture was immediately popular, partly because of its simplicity, but also because of the generosity it implied.

These three gestures were used universally. Although some classes added other gestures, these three became the core. And this **simple three-step sequence** somehow became synonymous with what we were trying to achieve in classroom discussion: that in learning through discussion we **listen, think, speak, pass on, listen, think**.

It is important to grasp that these gestures are not gimmicky - as well as being part of the routines which help make pupils effective contributors to group discussion, they are the physical manifestation of a really very complex processes, and as such they help learners to think about what they are doing - they help to make the learning visible.

## DVD LINK:

- P7 pupils reviewing the gestures
- P3/4 pupil attempting to explain the basic thumbs gestures to two nursery class pupils

## Questions for professional reflection:

- To what extent do you already use 'thumbs' to indicate readiness to speak?
- What difference might it make to discussion in your classroom if you were to adopt the 'three-step sequence'?



# Learning in Groups



## Learning in Groups

---

This may sound really obvious, but it's worth emphasising: just because young people are sitting in groups, it doesn't mean that they are learning in groups. It is possible to go into a classroom where learners are all in groups, and where there is no interaction whatsoever, apart from the occasional sharing of pencil or book or rubber. This is not working in groups, it is simply arranging the furniture. Learners working effectively in groups are developing interactive skills - listening to others, responding, asking questions, presenting and building ideas, reflecting, justifying, evaluating, reaching consensus. In an effective group, you can hear learning happening.

And effective groups can be virtually any size, from pairs to groups of twelve. Project teachers explored a variety of group sizes, taking into account the purpose of the discussion, and sometimes pupil preferences. It became common in project classrooms for teachers to vary the group sizes within the lesson, often using pairs or trios to generate ideas, and larger groups to explore and build upon these ideas.

Interestingly, most pupils who were asked, stated a preference for working in trios to generate ideas rather than in pairs, probably because it allows for mediation/arbitration by the third member, while still being intimate. Some of the project teachers used this grouping to explore gender mixes - two boys and a girl, for example - or roles, such as one person 'challenging' the assertions of the other two.

Sometimes learners were assigned roles, particularly in larger groups. For example, 'chair' and 'reporter'. Learners were sometimes asked to become observers of the group, in order to evaluate how effectively it was working and feed back to group members. It is important though, that they understand the purpose of these roles, and that the roles don't get in the way of building ideas.

However, learners working in groups - even large groups - do not always have to be assigned roles. Given that part of the purpose of the project work was to develop children's capacities as independent learners, it should not be surprising that they might also become adept at moving the discussion on through a process of consensus, a joint responsibility for maintaining the flow of the discussion, rather than through an appointed chair, or leader. But it still takes you aback when you first see it, and as a teacher, you might even feel redundant. Of course, if your pupils manage to accomplish this, what you should feel is successful.

It is worth mentioning at this point the teacher's place in group dynamics. So far, we've dealt with groups where the teacher is not a contributor - but what about when the teacher is a part of the group? At some point in the lesson, for example, when the teacher is introducing ideas or when she is leading a reflection session at the end of the lesson, she will be part of the class



group. If she is acting as facilitator for pupils' thinking, then she really should be physically on a level with the class, rather than above it. So for example, if the children are sitting on chairs, she should also sit, unless there is a very good reason not to, for example, if she is working with an electronic whiteboard. If she is standing while the pupils are sitting, it reinforces her position as the authoritative thinker and speaker, the person with the right answers, which is comforting for the teacher, but doesn't signal to pupils that their thoughts are as valid as hers.

In many of the project classrooms, teachers and pupils moved chairs into a horseshoe formation to engage in whole class discussion. While this takes a bit of time, it has many advantages: the idea of equality is made explicit; pupils can make eye contact easily and see the talk gym gestures clearly. It takes a bit of time, but many project teachers felt that it was time very well spent.

For some this may seem to be an impossible task - for example with a class of 25 - 30 and a relatively small room. The important thing in this case is to be flexible, to be adaptive - and to ask pupils to come up with solutions.

You might be wondering what learners were actually talking about in groups - was it all at a philosophical level? At this point, I think it is important to restate our central idea:

## Talking and listening is at the heart of learning

The point of developing children's capacities for effective talking and listening, is so that they can use these capacities to learn in a variety of contexts. In the project classrooms, teaching and learning about talking and listening were linked to a range of tasks. For example, learners used pairs, trios and larger groups to:

- Discuss features of a story (eg characterisation)
- Formulate questions on a story which another group would then answer
- Plan a garden
- Explore genre (eg fairy tale)
- Sequence ideas
- Create a 'character' pizza
- Establish a historical timeline
- Create a set of school rules
- Explore the ideas in a painting
- Choose between two solutions to a real-life problem
- Write a poem
- Plan a scientific experiment

- Evaluate their own talking and listening skills
- Plan a dramatic performance
- Plan a 'French breakfast'
- Discuss their feelings about and experiences of bullying
- Replace the 'boring' adjectives in a story with more exciting ones and explain their choices to another group.

I could go on and on. Perhaps the point is, that there are very few contexts for learning which are not enhanced by enabling pupils to develop the skills of effective discussion. Sometimes those skills will be used to explore an abstract concept, and sometimes to engage in a more 'practical' activity.

## **DVD LINK:**

- Pupils working in pairs, trios, larger groups
- Pupil/teacher horseshoe
- P3 pupil chairing discussion

## **Questions for professional reflection:**

- To what extent are the use of pairs/trios/ larger groups a normal part of your present classroom practice?
- How often do you become part of a group, rather than the person in charge of it?
- How do you help pupils to take responsibility for moving the discussion on?



# Questioning



# Questioning

---

**'Judicious questioning is nearly half the learning'**

Bruner

Teachers, of course, ask lots of questions - some 1.5 million in the average professional lifetime. We know, of course, that there are lots of alternatives to questions, other ways of helping learners to engage with ideas; but sooner or later, we will be using questions - for example, to test understanding, to prompt ideas, to guide thinking.

At the outset of the project, we felt that it would be necessary to do some work in this area, especially because we wanted to create the climate for sustained thinking and discussion, and in order to 'deepen the dialogue' we had to feel confident that our questions, when we used them, were the right ones. Furthermore, we wanted to be able to discuss questions with young learners, to enable them to understand the purpose and effect of various kinds of questions; and so teachers had to gain a high level of confidence themselves.

We began by doing some work on **Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive processes**. Although most teachers had an understanding of the principle of 'open' and 'closed' questions, they had not thought deeply about the exact purpose of their open questions: for example, when they asked a question about a story, was it designed to improve **comprehension** of the text, or to develop pupils' **analytical** skills? How often did they ask pupils to **evaluate** aspects of the story?

The work we did around Bloom's taxonomy involved teachers analysing questions they were using in the classroom- for example, in relation to a text - and led to many of them realising that they did not use enough 'higher order' questions, that is, questions which challenged learners to analyse, synthesise and evaluate. This alone made a huge difference to what they were doing in the classroom, but it didn't stop there, for everyone felt that it was important that their pupils, who were after all co-learners in the project - also began to share some understanding of question-types.

At the most basic level, P1 teachers realised that many very young learners did not even have a clear understanding of what a **question was** -ie they could not differentiate between a question and a statement. Not only did this mean a change to what and how they were teaching, it led of course to the understanding that some of their previous teaching using questions might well have been lost on those learners.

Further up the school, some teachers developed question fans as tools for helping pupils to understand and use a variety of question types. Based on an idea from a teacher in North



Yorkshire, these fans contained question stems for pupils to use; in some cases, they contained actual questions, but colour-coded to indicate the type of question. Pupils enjoyed using these, which were visually and - since they were laminated - kinaesthetically attractive.

**At all stages**, pupils were expected to formulate their own questions, and to question each other, which in itself led to an increase in independent learning.

All of this, of course, begs the question of what you do with learners' responses to those questions, but we'll touch on that in the next section on **building ideas**.

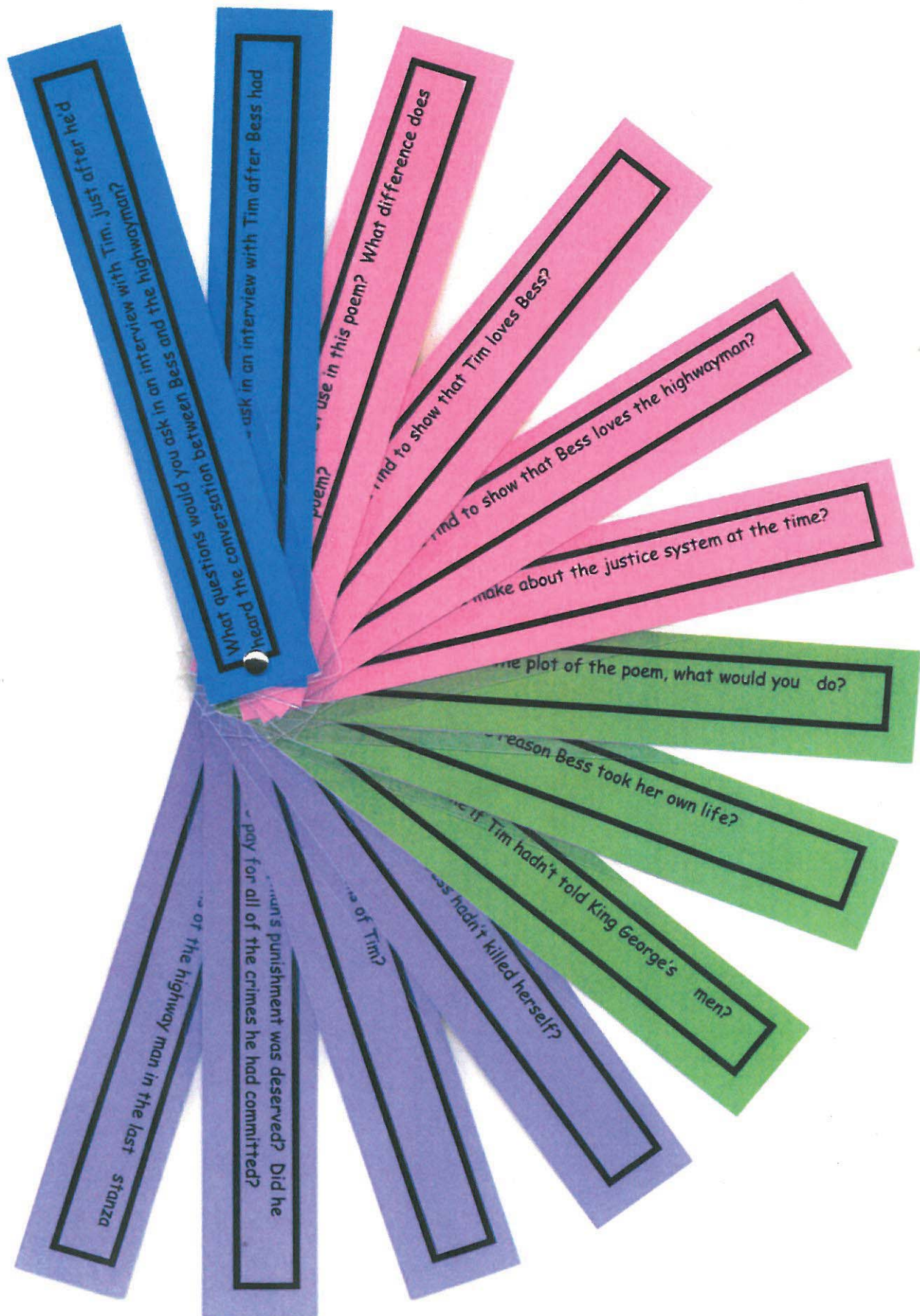
## **DVD LINK:**

- Teachers using challenging questions in P1
- P3/4 learners formulating questions
- P6 learners using a question fan

## **Questions for professional reflection:**

- How confident are you that you use a range of open and closed questions?
- How consciously do you use cognitively challenging questions?
- What do you teach your pupils about questions?
- How often do learners in your classes formulate their own questions?







## APPLYING BLOOM'S TAXONOMY OF COGNITIVE PROCESSES

Thinking processes	useful verbs	Sample question stems	Some potential activities and products
<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	tell list describe relate locate write find state name	What happened after...? How many...? Who was it that...? Can you name the...? Describe what happened at...? Who spoke to...? Can you tell why...? Find the meaning of...? What is...? Which is true or false...?	Make a list of the main events of the story. Make a timeline of events. Make a facts chart. Write a list of any pieces of information you can remember. List all the animals in the story. Make a chart showing... Make an acrostic. Recite a poem.
<b>COMPREHENSION</b>	explain interpret outline discuss distinguish predict restate translate compare describe	Can you write in your own words...? Can you write a brief outline...? What do you think could have happened next...? Who do you think...? What was the main idea...? Who was the key character...? Can you distinguish between...? What differences exist between...? Can you provide an example of what you mean...? Can you provide a definition for...?	Cut out, or draw, pictures to show a particular event. Illustrate what you think the main idea was. Make a cartoon strip showing the sequence of events. Write and perform a play based on the story. Retell the story in your words. Paint a picture of some aspect of the story you like. Write a summary report of the event. Prepare a flow chart to illustrate the sequence of events. Make a colouring book.
<b>APPLICATION</b>	solve show use illustrate calculate construct complete examine classify	Do you know of another instance where...? Could this have happened in...? Can you group by characteristics such as...? Which factors would you change if...? Can you apply the method used to some experience of your own...? What questions would you ask of...? From the information given, can you develop a set of instructions about...? Would this information be useful if you had a ...?	Construct a model to demonstrate how it will work. Make a diorama to illustrate an important event. Make a scrapbook about the areas of study. Make a paper-mache map to include relevant information about an event. Take a collection of photographs to demonstrate a particular point. Make up a puzzle game using ideas from the study area. Make a clay model of an item in the material. Design a market strategy for your product using a known strategy as a model. Dress a doll in national costume. Paint a mural using the same materials. Write a textbook about...for others.



Thinking processes	useful verbs	Sample question stems	Some potential activities and products
<b>ANALYSIS</b>	analyse distinguish examine compare contrast investigate categorise identify explain separate advertise	Which events could not have happened? If...happened, what might the ending have been? How was this similar to....? What was the underlying theme of...? What do you see as other possible outcomes? Why did...changes occur? Can you compare your...with that presented in...? Can you explain what must have happened when...? How is...similar to...? What are some of the problems of...? Can you distinguish between...? What were some of the motives behind...? What was the turning point in the game? What was the problem with...?	Design a questionnaire to gather information. Write a commercial to sell a new product. Conduct an investigation to produce information to support a view. Make a flow chart to show the critical stages. Construct a graph to illustrate selected information. Make a jigsaw puzzle. Make a family tree showing relationships. Put on a play about the study area. Write a biography of a person studied. Prepare a report about the area of study. Arrange a party. Make all the arrangements and record the steps needed. Review a work of art in terms of form, colour and texture.
<b>SYNTHESIS</b>	create invent compose predict plan construct design imagine improve propose devise formulate	Can you design a... to...? Why not compose a song about...? Can you see a possible solution to...? If you had access to all resources, how would you deal with...? Why don't you devise your own way to...? What would happen if...? How many ways can you...? Can you create new and unusual uses for....? Can you write a new recipe for a tasty dish? Can you develop a proposal which would....?	Invent a machine to do a specific task. Design a building to house your study. Create a new product. Give it a name and plan a marketing campaign. Write about your feelings in relation to... Write a TV show, play, puppet show, role play, song or pantomime about.... Design a record, book or magazine cover for... Make up a new language code and write material using it. Sell an idea. Devise a way to.... Compose a rhythm or put new words to a known melody.
<b>EVALUATION</b>	judge select choose decide justify debate verify argue recommend assess discuss rate prioritise determine	Is there a better solution to....? Judge the value of... Can you defend your position about....? Do you think... is a good or bad thing? How would you have handled...? What changes to... would you recommend? Do you believe....? Are you a ...person? How would you feel if....? How effective are...? What do you think about...?	Prepare a list of criteria to judge a ... show. Indicate priority and ratings. Conduct a debate about an issue of special interest. Make a booklet about five rules you see as important. Convince others. Form a panel to discuss views, e.g. 'Learning at School'. Write a letter to... advising on changes needed at... Write a half-yearly report. Prepare a case to present your view about...



# Building Ideas



## Building Ideas

**'If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue'**  
Bakhtin

If you look again at the key principles of dialogic teaching, you will probably have noticed that the ideas and experiences outlined so far have concentrated mostly on creating a classroom ethos and dynamic which will allow the first three principles to be realised. The classrooms we have described are places where learning is **collective**, where teachers and pupils work together on the learning, using groups of varying sizes; they are **reciprocal**, because teachers and pupils are in the habit of listening to each other, of sharing ideas generously, rather than competing to see who can say the most and all learners are prepared to consider unfamiliar ideas and viewpoints; they are **supportive**, because class members aren't afraid to give 'wrong' answers, since they know that testing out ideas and rejecting them is a vital part of the learning process, and that everyone's contribution is important.

If in Inverclyde we could get to the point where we could confidently claim that that every single one of our classrooms exemplified these three principles, we would already have achieved an enormous amount. But having created these conditions, we might then wish to consider the last two dialogic principles: to make sure that classroom talk is **purposeful**, that is, that teachers plan the use of classroom talk to achieve specific educational ends; and that it is **cumulative**, that teachers and pupils **build upon** each other's ideas so that everyone can see a coherently expressed line of thought. It has to be said, that this latter aspect is difficult to achieve, but that there is much fun to be had in the trying.

So how we might we go about this? Let's consider first of all, teacher-pupil dialogue, such as we might find in whole class interaction or when the teacher is working with a small group. We have already touched on the importance of careful questioning; but what we do with the answers to those questions is the difference between chaining, building ideas and a series of disconnected questions and answers which may be broadly related but which do not add up to a clear line of enquiry. And the aim, remember, is to connect.

So if the first step is to make sure that the question is open, the second stage is to make sure that the resulting answer is fully explored; so that the teacher might challenge the learner answering by asking him to give reasons for his answer, and then continue to probe those reasons with further questions; she might invite other pupils to ask questions of the respondent, or to agree or disagree and provide reasons.

As pupils become more confident, and more independent, teachers will be able to **stand back** from the dialogue, and allow pupils to continue building the ideas themselves, until she feels that



there is a need to move the discussion on by scaffolding the next stage of the discussion. Even the very youngest pupils in project classrooms were able to take small steps to independent thinking and chaining of ideas. In some of the older classrooms, pupils displayed an impressive ability to build ideas for an extended period of time without teacher intervention. There are some very good examples of this on the DVD, where you will see teachers prompting and facilitating enquiry, rather than directing and controlling it. In one notable example, the teacher begins as part of the group, but then leaves it, and pupils are able to continue building ideas on their own until she rejoins it.

Of course, as Alexander points out, cumulative dialogue requires **thinking** from all concerned, which means that as teachers we need to be willing to think out loud sometimes, and to admit that we also need time to think. Which means that we have to be prepared to devote time to it.

Since part of our project was to develop learners' awareness of the processes they were using, teachers found it helpful to develop a vocabulary that made the chaining explicit: eg 'I'd like to **add** to what John said'. To be aware that you are building rather than just repeating ideas, is of course very difficult, and some teachers found that when it came to this level of sophistication, it was very useful to use pupil observers whose job was to feedback on the quality of the enquiry. Even more effective was using a digital camera to record the dialogue/discussion and then analysing the quality of ideas building with the class.

Which leads us neatly into the next section.

## **DVD LINK:**

- Teachers standing back from the discussion
- Pupils in P1 beginning to build ideas
- Pupils in P6 sustaining lengthy, complex dialogue/discussion with minimal teacher intervention

## **Questions for professional reflection:**

- To what extent do you consciously use scaffolded dialogue to chain ideas towards a specific end?
- To what extent is planning opportunities for classroom talk a normal part of your planning for learning?
- What do you teach pupils about building ideas?
- How confident are your pupils in sustaining complex discussion without your intervention? What difference might it make to their learning if they were?



# Reflecting





## Reflecting

Largely because of AfL, we are very familiar with the idea of inviting pupils to reflect on what they've learned; most teachers do this by way of a short plenary session at the end of the lesson. It is not difficult to see that, by developing pupils' confidence and skills in dialogue and discussion, this process will become much more effective.

But in our project classrooms, pupils didn't just reflect on what they'd learned, they reflected on how they'd learned, for in lessons focusing on TLL, the medium was also the message. And in taking time to discuss their use of talking and listening in learning, they were, of course, further enhancing their skills, as well as deepening their understanding of the learning process. As the Strathclyde evaluation put it: 'this was metacognition in action.'

As you will note from the DVD, this can be done in a various ways. By far the most popular with TLL teachers was to use a horseshoe formation at the end of the lesson, so that the reflection session became another opportunity for dialogue and discussion. In one school where P6 and P7 shared an open plan area, the two classes frequently came together to discuss how they were learning. However, in other classes, where pupils had been learning in trios for the lesson, the teacher asked learners also to reflect on their cooperative learning in their trios, and simply contribute a point or two to the subsequent - brief - class plenary session.

Technology can also be useful here: some teachers made use of digital cameras and whiteboards to film groups and then reflect as a class on how the learners were developing their skills. Others made use of peer observers, who watched and commented.

It will be obvious that this has implications in terms of pace - discussion takes time. However, pace also means depth, especially so in language learning, and scaffolded dialogue and effective discussion certainly allow for depth. Certainly pupils felt that they understood better when they were allowed to work together and to discuss their learning.

But it's not only young learners who benefit from improved classroom talk - it's better for teachers, too. If pupils are better able to articulate their understanding, teachers are better able to adapt their teaching to meet the learning needs of pupils. And there are other benefits for teachers.

Most of the project teachers felt that in working with children to improve their talking and listening, and in creating more opportunities for dialogue, discussion and reflection, that they became better teachers. But they also felt that they were better at contributing to professional discussion. And if we are to become more reflective practitioners, will not these skills - listening, thinking before responding, working collaboratively - also become vital for us? Should we not be able to exemplify what we teach?

## **DVD LINK:**

- Pupils from P3-P7 reflecting on their learning

## **Questions for professional reflection:**

- Do you create opportunities for pupils to reflect on how they have learned, as well as what they have learned?
- As a teacher, and as a reflective professional, do you exemplify the skills outlined in Talking round Corners?



## Sample Lessons



## Lesson Plan 1

### Exemplifies

- beginnings / talk gym
- learning in groups / effective groupings
- questioning

**Special Features** This lesson took place on 25th September early in the term.

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** 16

### Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Interact with each other in whole class and group situations
- Apply knowledge in order to discuss characters, feelings, predict an outcome and change story ending
- Discuss feelings and identify suitable vocabulary
- Use talking and listening strategies
- Practise gestures and understand what makes good talk

### Learning intention

- Use knowledge to discuss feelings
- Use listening and talking rules
- Make a prediction

### Context

Big book - Shark with no teeth

### Observations

- Rules for good talk recapped
- Children using thumbs
- Use of Bloom's taxonomy - good questions 'How did he feel?' 'What do you think happened next?' 'Why do you think that?'
- All pupils engaged in lesson
- Teacher kept with one child to expand ideas
- Children at such an early stage are confident and comfortable with using gestures
- Children tentatively using talking partners

### Points to take forward

- Keep doing what you're doing - this is a great start
- Keep working with talking partners to encourage exploration of ideas.



## Lesson Plan 2

**Exemplifies**

- beginnings / talk gym
- questioning
- reflecting

**Special Features** Illustrative of using the context as a vehicle for development of skills

**Stage** Primary 4

**Number of Pupils involved** 27

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Use poetry study to provide the opportunity for children to continue to develop their knowledge and understanding of the basic rules of talk
- Use body language, gestures, signals, thinking time etc
- Work as whole group, in trios and in pairs

## Learning Intention

- To encourage metacognition by talking about thinking
- Improve discussion techniques and confidence
- Improve children's ability to pose questions and respond to them

## Context

'My Bruvver' poem

## Observations

- Children identifying rules for good climate for talk and articulating ideas
- Children demonstrating an understanding of reasons for gestures / setting etc
- A supportive, non judgemental atmosphere is beginning to be built in groups
- Teacher responded to each pupil's idea with 'Thank you' rather than 'Good' or 'Well done' thus showing that she values the response but does not pass judgement on its worth. This indicates all ideas are accepted.
- Children are trying to remember to keep to the talk rules

## Points to take forward

- Encourage pupils to reflect on group dynamics e.g. how they organised the group
- Encourage children to monitor their own performance in the group e.g. did they adhere to the talk rules
- Encourage pupils to look round the group whilst speaking and not solely focus on the teacher
- Move to pupils being able to move the talk on by taking charge rather than relying on the teacher

## Lesson Plan 3

**Exemplifies** learning in groups / effective groupings

**Special Features** Use of Bloom's Taxonomy in Primary 1

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** 16

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Comprehension - Can you think of the most important items the staff need in school?
- Analysis - Investigate teachers' duties and order the items in order of importance

## Learning Intention

- To share ideas in order to further thinking
- To use the talking and listening rules

## Context

- Whole class discussion using Big Book - create a story and interactive white board
- Children will split into twos and discuss a member of staff
- In twos children will sort three pictures of items the staff use according to importance

## Observations

- This was one of the first times pupils took information discussed as a whole class group into the group of two and used it to work on a task
- Pupils paired off with those sitting beside them in the group and this worked well
- Interesting discussion ensued trying to reach consensus
- Noisy - children loved placing the cards in the order they thought was important!

## Points to take forward

- Take the children out of their comfort zone of their groups
- Pair up with pupils they are not used to sitting or playing with



## Lesson Plan 4

### Exemplifies

- learning in groups/effective groupings
- building ideas, deepening the dialogue

**Special Features** 'We give reasons to explain our ideas.'

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** 14

### Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Interaction with each other in whole class and trios
- Use listening and talking strategies
- Make decisions

### Learning Intention

- To agree on an outcome
- Use rules of listening and talking particularly we give reasons to explain our ideas

### Context

- Introduction to new topic - Weather
- Make decisions about what each symbol represents
- Decide what is good / bad weather
- Use knowledge about weather to discuss suitable clothing and actions for a rainy day

### Observations

- Children use of gestures and formulation of questions improving
- Some pupils giving expanded responses
- Teacher highlighting 'We give reasons to explain our ideas.'
- Teacher kept with one pupil allowing thinking time - other teachers would possibly have given up, prompted or moved on

### Points to take forward

- Continue stressing giving reasons for thinking
- The task after the discussion went well - keep with the activity
- Encourage the children to ask their own questions

## Lesson Plan 5

## Exemplifies - questioning

**Special Features** Good introduction to questioning

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** 23

### Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- To improve children's ability to talk and listen in a group
- To allow thinking time to encourage extended answers
- To encourage all to contribute in a relevant manner
- To use thumbs up (I would like to speak) and gesturing to pass on discussion
- To encourage children to pass discussion on without mediating through teacher
- To discourage repeating what someone else has said

### Learning Intention

- To be able to discuss to discuss a story, suggest ideas and justify them
- To be able to recognise what a question is

### Context

- Big Book - Who sank the boat? By Pamela Allen
- Look at cover. Discuss vocabulary as it occurs
- Predict who is going to sink the boat
- Read story with pupils joining in to reinforce
- Study picture
- Read story again observe that it is written in rhyme - listen for rhyming words

### Discussion questions

1. The title of the story was a question. What is a question?
2. Do you ask questions? Why?
3. Do you ever ask the same question again? Why?
4. Do you always get answers to your questions?
5. Do you ask different people different things?
6. Do you think anyone knows all the answers to all the questions?
7. If you needed to find an answer to a question how could you find out?

### Observations

- Children encouraged to use gestures
- Children pushed to articulate reasons
- Challenge by other pupils encouraged
- Good idea of raised thumbs as 'Shouting with thumbs!'

### Points to take forward

- Revisit this whole area in another lesson



## Lesson Plan 6

**Exemplifies** - questioning

**Special Features** Development of children's questioning

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** 14

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- To discuss ideas after reading book extract
- To encourage children to ask questions and give reasons for their answers

## Learning Intention

- To be able to formulate questions and explain reasoning
- To explore ideas of safety and danger

## Context

- Reading Book - The Rope Swing

### Discussion Ideas

1. Why should you always ask mum or dad before you go somewhere?
2. Ask the children to give reasons for their answers and encourage others to help.
3. Invite the children to ask their own questions.
4. How do you know the stream isn't very deep?
5. Was this a good place to play?
6. Give reasons for your answer.
7. Where would it be safe to play? (Draw on their road safety knowledge.)

## Observations

- Teacher highlighted individual 'talk' targets for some pupils
- Emphasis on sharing ideas
- Encouraging deeper thinking by sticking with one child and asking others to elaborate on other's ideas.
- Use of higher order open questions - pupils now asking thinking questions "What might the man be thinking?"
- Pupils asking not only one person to answer but inviting more than one response.

## Points to take forward

- Keep practising children scanning the group when asking questions
- Keep working on children suggesting alternative points of view

## Lesson Plan 7

**Exemplifies** - building ideas, deepening the dialogue

**Special Features** Use of Talk as alternative to written writing planner

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** 16

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Whole class discussion
- Comprehension - Can you extend the story?

## Learning Intention

- To share ideas with each other in order to further thinking and progress the discussion
- To discuss feelings and emotions

## Context

- School writing planner
- The children will listen to the teacher introduce a story and they have to continue and extend the story

## Observations

- Teacher thought this was very interesting because she felt their imagination was fabulous
- Children did not have to worry about trying to draw their plan or ask for big words to spell
- Children also told different stories rather than just using the teacher's ideas
- Children loved listening to each other's stories
- Teacher felt for the first time that the pupils were in control of their own stories

## Points to take forward

- Start more writing lessons off like this
- Feel this will work better than a drawing plan



## Lesson Plan 8

## Exemplifies

- learning in groups / effective groupings
- stepping forward / stepping back
- reflecting

## Special Features Cross Curricular / Science Lesson

## Stage Primary 7

## Number of Pupils involved 18

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Learning to work collaboratively
- Teacher leaving control with pupils
- Reflecting on individual performance and on group performance

## Learning Intention

- To be able to work with others on a task Success Criteria
- Pupils will construct model which demonstrates inhalation and exhalation

## Context

- Science - making model lungs

### Task 1- Teacher explanation and design brief

- Discussion time of skills required for task (twos)

### Task 2- Using materials provided work through design process

- Problem solving
- Continue: take notes re process and difficulties
- Test model lungs

### Task 3- Recap learning Intention and success criteria

- Elicit information on what pupils have learned about working with a partner

## Problem solving

- How are you going to complete your model if your partner needs help?
- What will you do if the elastic band doesn't hold?
- What techniques could you use to help both yourself and your group?
- How will the spokesperson manage group disagreement and frustration??

## Observations

- Teacher stressed that the learning intention was the process
- Pupils were involved in a pre-task audit and post task evaluation
- The plenary session gave pupils opportunity for reflection
- Some pupils saw value in pooling resources to at least make one model

## Points to take forward

- Keep pushing Talking Round Corners processes out to other curricular areas
- Encourage pupils to be aware of others' learning styles when working
- Some will prefer listening to instructions / some need to see the picture
- Spokesperson can make sure both covered when leading group
- Use more of this 'Apply / Teach / Apply' approach

## Lesson Plan 9

**Exemplifies** - reflecting

**Special Features** Pupil articulation of impact / Good PSD session

**Stage** Primary 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 23

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Discussion of what makes good climate for talk
- Bloom's Taxonomy

## Learning Intention

- To speak about personal experiences
- To reflect on effect
- To adhere to talk rules

## Context

- Large group discussion led by teacher but gradually turned over to pupils

## Observations

- Group who have been using Bloom's talked about their experience and gave advice to group just beginning
- All recapped rules of climate for good talk
- Pupils not only reflected on the rules but gave the principles behind them
- New gesture of receiving the invitation to speak was in use
- Pupils spoke about building on ideas of other pupils
- There was a good pace of talk
- Previously quiet children articulated how Talking Round Corners had helped them gain in confidence
- Previously 'jumpy, interrupting' boy spoke about how Talking Round Corners had helped him to calm down and take his turn

## Points to take forward

- Keep encouraging pupils to look round the group when speaking and not just at the teacher
- Pupils are beginning to link ideas and respond to points made by others - keep working on developing the dialogue in this way
- Pupils are aware of their own contributions - look at this self assessment and use to identify personal next steps



## Lesson Plan 10

**Exemplifies** - learning in groups  
- effective grouping

**Special Features** This lesson was delivered in the Gaelic medium

**Stage** Primary 4 - 7 **Number of Pupils involved** 13

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Learning Talk
  - negotiate - selection of attributes of 6 energy sources
  - argue, reason and justify selection
  - explore and evaluate ideas - poster design

## Learning Intention

- Use negotiation skills
- Explain choice

## Context

- Environmental studies 'The Wind Farm'
- Children have already created a questionnaire ascertaining pupils awareness of attitude to energy conservation
- Pupils choose from a selection of given attributes which are true for each energy source
- Select one of the fossil fuels, exploring and evaluating ideas on how best to show how much it is used in our daily lives
- Next steps - becoming more aware of need to save energy

## Observations

- Pupils on task and collaborating well
- Recorders knew what to do
- One pupil demonstrated that she was thinking as she was speaking
- ASN pupil doing well - looking at speaker, asking questions and contributing

## Points to take forward

- Pupils enjoy large class discussions and too much was expected in groups this time
- Resorted to whole class discussion in the end
- Vocabulary was challenging - should have gone over this at start of lesson through large class discussion.

**Lesson Plan 11 Exemplifies** - building ideas and deepening the dialogue  
- reflecting

**Special Features** This lesson was delivered through the Gaelic medium  
Teacher observation

**Stage** Primary 4 - 7 **Number of Pupils involved** 13

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Children to use agreed signals to sustain discussion
- Receiving, acting and building upon answers
- Exploring and evaluating ideas

## Learning Intention

- All pupils to contribute to discussion
- Use agreed rules

## Context

- Science - food chains. Particularly discussing carnivores which led onto man-eating animals

## Observations

- Children becoming more self-reliant
- Able to go back to points already made and expand on them
- Addressing each other by name when citing points
- One boy picked up on points made by 3 other children and shared his extended knowledge
- One girl gave a longer than usual oration (wringing hands whilst talking-nervous) she addressed the teacher but teacher said "What about the rest?" Then girl said "Everybody" and continued
- One boy seemed not to be participating but from my knowledge of him was listening closely albeit with his head down
- One boy who usually interrupts and can appear impatient seems more relaxed, calm and seems to be really listening during such class interactions
- Teacher tries to hold back as much as possible.
- Tries to stick to agreed rules for talk
- Tries to avert the gaze of younger pupils who are talking in order to let them develop confidence in their own abilities and not depend so much on her

## Points to take forward

- Keep working on turns managed by shared routine
- Provoke further discussion so that questions are seen as the building blocks of dialogue and not its terminal point



## Lesson Plan 12

**Exemplifies** - reflecting

**Special Features** 2 classes together as large group

**Stage** Primaries 6 and 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 42

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Talking about talking - discuss rules, gestures, seating etc

## Learning Intention

- P6 and P7 pupils will share ideas about their experiences

## Context

- Whole group to set topic and begin discussion
- Split into groups to exchange ideas and experiences
- Return to large group for feedback

## Observations

- New set up - all in large circle
- Pupils spoke about bonding and relationships
- Discussion about some differences in gesture. Was this important?
- Teacher stressed 'thinking time' for pupils and teacher and building on others' ideas
- Pupils discussed optimum age for being part of Talking Round Corners
- One pupil used the term 'scaffolding' the dialogue

## Points to take forward

- Are some gestures still necessary in small group situations?
- Have 2 cross class groups to facilitate larger numbers or would this defeat the purpose?
- Try this set up with more structured lesson or in a discrete curricular area
- Use in problem solving or when both classes involved in some project or other

## Lesson Plan 13

### Exemplifies

- questioning
- learning in groups
- effective grouping

**Special Features** Visiting group of pupils from another class

**Stage** Primary 3 with 10 Primary 2 pupils **Number of Pupils involved** 32

### Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Oral comprehension of text
- Think about and discuss what it means to boast

### Learning Intention

- Answer what, why, when and where questions about the text
- Express the thoughts, opinions and experiences of boasting
- Follow rules for good talk

### Context

- Robert Fisher 'First Stories for Thinking' extract 18 - The Wind and the Sun
- Teacher reads the story aloud
- In small mixed age groups of 3 or 4 through sheet of questions and answers debate the reasons and implications of boasting
- Each group to make up a really good question of their own to ask the class

### Observations

- Pupils discussed rules for good talk and familiarised the visitors well with the philosophy
- There was an interesting mix of ages working together with no apparent predominant age group
- Some good questions were generated
- Primary 3 pupils showed real ownership of their work developing Talk and were happy to share this expertise
- There was a shared sense of commitment to using the rules of good talk

### Points to take forward

- This is a good idea to take forward into other areas and classes
- Using the pupils as 'Talk' ambassadors could be rolled out
- Teacher is intending to use the same pupils to give the nursery children a 'Talk' experience



## Lesson Plan 14

## Exemplifies

- questioning
- learning in groups
- effective groupings

## Special Features

Motivating resource relevant to class group  
Use of interactive whiteboard

**Stage** Primary 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 18

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Pupils work in pairs and take turns at reporting
- Thumbs, fists, thinking time etc used in questioning / discussion

## Learning Intention

- To develop Thinking, Learning and Language skills
- More pupils actively engaged
- Pupil confidence grows
- Rules for collaborative work are followed
- Pupils encourage one another's understanding
- Less teacher driven sessions (eventually)

## Context

- 'Ugly' by The Sugababes - Pupils listen to the recording with a copy of the lyrics
- Listen, question and discuss Beauty
- **Discuss as class**
  1. "I noticed that my eyes and hair weren't the same." What does the singer mean?
  2. Her parents said that she was more beautiful. Why do you think they said that?
  3. "Personality reflects name." Explain
- **Discuss in pairs**
  4. What makes a person beautiful?
  5. What makes a person ugly?
  6. Do you think that a blind person can appreciate beauty?
  7. Is there some way in which all beautiful things are alike?

## Observations

- Children pushed to justify thinking / some good ideas
- Use of individual thinking time / some note taking to remember ideas if pupils wish
- As the discussion progressed the pupils took greater control
- For some pupils the pencil was proving to be an obstacle to thinking
- Use of music added interest
- The questions were demanding

## Points to take forward

- Perhaps do lesson on note taking so that pupils realise what is expected
- No paper or pencils next time
- Endeavour to build on answers of others

## Lesson Plan 15

**Exemplifies**

- beginnings
- talk gym
- questioning

**Special Features** Use of Bloom's Taxonomy in forming questions

**Stage** Primary 4

**Number of Pupils involved** 10 (Reading group)

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Questioning - expand question types / look for extended answers
- Thinking time
- Encourage children to listen to each other and respond to each others' answers
- Begin to be aware of 'rules' of discussion - everyone contributing / not interrupting

## Learning Intention

- Use skills of talk to develop understanding of text

## Context

- Ginn Key Comprehension Book 1 Unit 9 - The Boy and the Lion
- Questions
  - (knowledge)
    1. Why did the boy run away from the king?
    2. How did the boy help the lion?
  - (comprehension)
    1. what words tell us the boy was right to be afraid of the lion?
    2. "The king was amazed" - can you put this into your own words?
  - (application)
    1. What did the lion do when he saw the boy? How do you think the lion felt when he met the boy?
    2. In what other ways was the lion like a person?
  - (analysis)
    1. Why was the lion angry?
    2. Have you ever been angry when you were afraid or hurt?
  - (synthesis)
    1. What do you think would have happened if the boy had run away instead of helping the lion?
    2. Do you know any other stories about little boys or girls who escaped from danger?
  - (evaluation)
    1. What do you think the boy learned?
    2. Do you think the king learned anything?
- Task - In trios, make up a play from the story



## Observations

- Spoke to children before lesson about everyone contributing / not interrupting / being polite
- Reminded children of what they had been practising during circle time
- Think this did make some difference as there were fewer interruptions - gasps from children when it did happen
- However still some children barely participating
- Some children obviously really enjoying activity
- More extended answers beginning to appear from a few children

## Points to take forward

- Keep encouraging adherence to the rules for good talk
- Look for more contributions from reluctant pupils - perhaps nominating children to respond

## Lesson Plan 16

**Exemplifies** - learning in groups  
- effective groupings

**Special Feature** Use of programme for developing thinking  
Use of interactive whiteboard  
Reaching consensus

**Stage** Primary 2

**Number of Pupils involved** Group of 14

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Through sharing ideas, the children will sort cards into a correct order
- They will be expected to listen to each other and explain the reason for their choice

## Learning Intention

- To order a set of pictures sequentially to make a story
- To attend to more than one feature at a time
- To recognise distractions in pictures

## Context

- Let's Think - a programme for developing thinking in 5 and 6 year olds
- Use the whiteboard to discuss each picture individually and establish that all know the main features of the pictures are
- What particular features are helpful in deciding the order? - (boots?)
- Discuss what we need to think about in making a story
- Allow pupils to explore various orders of cards, questioning them to explain their reasons for a particular choice
- Listen to each other so that they can develop their choice
- When they are all agreed on a choice appoint a spokesperson to tell the whole story

## Observations

- Good questioning by teacher provoked thinking and interesting responses
- Pace was very good - all children enjoyed the discussion
- Great vocabulary from pupils - lush, towering, bushy
- Children beginning to explain reasoning and evaluate their own response

## Points to take forward

- The pace of this lesson was good and kept the interest - this is a feature of lessons in this class which should be recognised
- Teacher noticed the value of breaking a story down in this way and saw it as good support for those children who find difficulty in adding detail to stories. She was going to use this more



## Lesson Plan 17

### Exemplifies

- talk gym
- learning in groups / effective groupings
- building ideas, deepening the dialogue

**Special Features** classify statements and challenge viewpoints

**Stage** Primary 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 24

### Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Children will work collaboratively to decide if statements are accurate or not
- They will consider their own viewpoint and be able to justify it through a questioning scenario

### Learning Intention

- We are learning to classify statements whilst also challenging others' viewpoint

### Context

- Going to school versus being educated at home
- Ginn reading extract 'Free to Choose'

### Introduction

- Teacher reads story which focuses on the lifestyle of home educated child
- Recap on 'Talk Gym' and correct manner to manage disagreement

### Activity 1

- Spokesperson in each group displays 3 headings 'true, false and not enough information'
- Decision is made on most efficient way to allow all group members to see and hear statements
- Group work collaboratively to classify statements
- Spokesperson ensures that all group members are involved as well as acting as mediator

### Activity 2

- Spokesperson opens concealed task box to determine next task
- Tasks will be

Collect arguments in favour of home schooling

Or

Collecting and annotating arguments in favour of standard schooling

- Each group must strive towards ensuring that their arguments are realistic and convincing
- Individual group members report back to rest of class

### Activity 3

- Each group will take part in a 'Hot Seat' exercise where they are questioned by children from an opposing group
- Children on the 'Hot Seat' must continue to uphold their stance throughout, whilst also answering in a clear, convincing manner
- At the same time, children who are questioning should strive towards asking challenging questions

### Plenary

- Children assemble to consider level of enjoyment and fulfilment of learning intention

## Observations

- This is the first time children have attempted 'hot seating' on such a scale
- Teacher wanted to challenge the children's ability to implement all their talking / listening / thinking skills by creating a situation wherein they had to remain calm in order to effectively respond to questioning
- Within the class there are a few children who are particularly shy and still need frequent reminding of eye contact
- A new pupil from Ireland with a strong accent has joined the class which emphasised the need for slow clearly articulated speech
- The 'Mission Impossible' task in a CD case was a great idea
- There was a good balance between activities and dialogue
- The pupils were really involved in a challenging activity

## Points to take forward

- Encourage shorter, briefer statements rather than long sentences as feedback-practise notetaking?
- Keep on with 'hot seating' and think about filming some sessions



## Lesson Plan 18

**Exemplifies** - working in groups  
- effective groupings

**Special Features** Bloom's Taxonomy in Primary 7  
Whole class working in trios, then in 2 groups of 12

**Stage** Primary 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 24

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- To allow pupils to work cooperatively to interrogate text.
- To allow pupils to continue to develop discussion skills and techniques in small and larger group settings

## Learning Intention

- Pupils will understand how to share their thoughts and opinions of text in a discussion using previously identified skills
- Pupils will understand the text in a more meaningful way

## Context

- 'The Highwayman' by Alfred Noyes

*Questions are given to the children in the form of a fan*

(application)

- What questions would you ask in an interview with Tim just after he'd heard the conversation between Bess and the highwayman?
- What questions would you ask of Tim after Bess had died?

(analysis)

- What patterns does the poet use in this poem? What difference do these make to the poem?
- What evidence can you find to show that Tim loves Bess?
- What evidence can you find to show that Bess loves the highwayman?
- What conclusion can you make about the justice system of the time?

(synthesis)

- Suppose you could change the plot of the poem, what would you do?
- Can you say more about the reason Bess took her own life?
- Can you predict the outcome if Tim hadn't told King George's men?
- Do you agree with Tim's actions?

(evaluation)

- Would it have been better if Bess hadn't killed herself?
- Do you agree with the actions of the highwayman in the last stanza of part 2?
- Do you think the highwayman's punishment was deserved? Did he deserve to die to pay for all of the crimes he had committed?

## Observations

- Pupils transferred and used skills in larger group setting
- Pupils were able to 'self govern' in larger group
- Any 'rule breaking' was dealt with in the group by peers in a mature and reasonable manner
- 'Rule breakers' accepted peer judgement without feeling criticised

## Points to take forward

- Too many questions for specified time
- Allow more time?
- Cut down number of questions?
- Give 2 or 3 different opportunities to revisit questions?
- Give 2 or 3 different opportunities to revisit questions with different trios?



## Lesson Plan 19a

**Exemplifies** - beginnings

**Special Features** moderate learning difficulties group  
1st in run of 3 lessons

**Stage** Primary 6 / 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 8 boys

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Beginnings the process

## Learning Intention

- Setting the ground rules
- Use correct body language and have eye contact

## Context

- Language - discussion of favourite television programmes

## Observations

- Lots of praise, encouragement and reassurance helped to get the group started
- Good participation
- Group sat in a circle

## Points to take forward

- Remind pupils of rules of discussion
- Model language

## Lesson Plan 19b

**Exemplifies** - beginnings

**Special Features** - moderate learning difficulties group  
- 2 months after lesson 19a

**Stage** Primary 6 / 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 8 boys

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Discussion skills

## Learning Intention

- Establish class rules
- Progress questions / discussion
- Involve all pupils

## Context

- Language - 'The school pupil council' discussion

## Observations

- Boys appeared interested but needed lots of modelling of language
- Certain boys have difficulty staying on task

## Points to take forward

- Always remind the group about our rules during class discussion, eye contact and body language
- Take note of who is not becoming involved



## Lesson Plan 19c

**Exemplifies** - beginnings

**Special Features** - moderate learning difficulties group  
- 3 months after lesson 19a

**Stage** Primary 6 / 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 8 boys

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Encourage discussion

## Learning Intention

- Use of skills of good discussion
- Adhere to discussion skills
- Become more skilled with questions of knowledge, analysis and application

## Context

- Language - 'Restaurants' following a visit to a local restaurant
- Environmental studies - social subjects 'People in Society'

## Observations

- All of the group contributed today - this is a first!

## Points to take forward

- Develop a more appropriate pace during discussion

## Lesson Plan 20

### Exemplifies

- learning in groups
- effective groupings
- stepping forward / stepping back

### Special Features

classroom organisation  
teacher awareness

**Stage** Primary 7

**Number of Pupils involved** 24

### Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- To allow pupils to discuss text
- To allow pupils to bounce ideas back and forth
- To move understanding of the text forward

### Learning Intention

- Pupils will understand how to use discussion techniques to share ideas
- Pupils will use discussion techniques to work more independently

### Context

- Key comprehension 4 Unit 18 'The Meeting' extract from 'Goodnight Mr Tom' by Michelle Magorian
- Working in trios and then in groups of 12

### Observations

- Pupils were fully on task, really concentrating on the text and finding evidence from the text - WOW
- Pupils were able to organise themselves and furniture when structure of activities changed with no fuss. Their aim was to facilitate discussion
- Discussion was taking place very successfully without teacher interaction ( interruption??)
- Issue of when teacher should stand back

### Points to take forward

- Aim for pupils questioning each other's viewpoint or asking for clarification



## Lesson Plan 21a

**Exemplifies** - talk gym  
- questioning

**Special Features** 1st in run of 3 lessons

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** whole class 14

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- Through sharing ideas the children will begin to develop thinking skills
- Reinforce rules for good talk in particular make eye contact

## Learning Intention

- Children will form own questions giving emphasis on asking how someone might feel
- Children choose who to answer their question
- Consider 'what if?' scenario

## Context

Read 'On the Sand' stage 3 ORT

- Invite the children to ask their own questions about each page
- Discuss what might happen if:
  1. they put sand on dad's face
  2. someone didn't see dad
  3. dad didn't waken up
  4. the donkey ran off
- Use the whiteboard to show pictures on page 12 /13. children work in pairs to suggest what could be written in speech bubbles  
'What do you think the children might have said?'

## Observations

- Teacher developing children's responses to questions by asking further questions
- Encouraging use of thinking time before indicating 'thumbs up' - I am ready to respond
- Link with previous session transferred knowledge to this scenario
- Children and teacher evaluating performance in plenary session particularly on how we did with rules for good talk

## Points to take forward

- Keep on with children formulating questions
- Develop working in pairs and trios

## Lesson Plan 21b

**Exemplifies** - talk gym  
- effective groupings

**Special Features** 2nd in run of 3 lessons

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** whole class 14

## Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- The children will begin to reflect on their opinions through exploratory talk

## Learning Intention

- We are learning to ask why
- Explain our answers

## Context

- The New House stage 4 ORT
- Children discuss what might be wrong with the picture which is on the whiteboard
- Picture on pages 6 + 7 are displayed, pupils discuss what might be wrong and explain why they think so
- On the next screen the children are given some thoughts of the neighbours. Working in pairs, the children are asked to decide which might be true and explain why they think so.
- Discuss in pairs what others in the picture might be thinking and write in the speech bubbles the ones they liked best
- Children ask their own questions - giving emphasis to giving reasons for their answers

## Observations

- Children are using talk gym gestures well
- Children are really beginning to engage in dialogue with each other and not through the teacher
- One girl made great suggestion of inappropriate footwear!
- Children are working on giving examples as evidence of what they're thinking
- Lots of interaction, use of gestures talking and explaining ideas

## Points to take forward

- Encourage children to look at everyone when asking their question
- Try working in trios



## Lesson Plan 21c

### Exemplifies

- talk gym
- effective groupings
- learning in groups

**Special Features** 3rd in run of 3 lessons

**Stage** Primary 1

**Number of Pupils involved** whole class 14

### Focus of lesson in context of Talking Round Corners

- The children will begin to reflect on their opinions through exploratory talk

### Learning Intention

- We are learning to reflect on our opinion
- Explain our answers

### Context

- 'Come In' stage 4 ORT
- Children discuss what might be unsafe in the picture which is on the whiteboard and decide on a few safety rules
- Picture on pages 10 + 11 are displayed. Pupils are asked to discuss in trios what might be unsafe or is an unsuitable game for playing inside and should give a reason for their answer.
- Discuss why this would not happen in their house. Is dad being a good parent?...What makes a good parent?.....Who do they agree with and why?
- Look at the next flipchart and discuss in trios what rules dad should give the children. Use the fill tool to choose the best rules. Agree on a rule to write in the speech bubble.
- On the next flipchart the children are asked to suggest what mum might have said and how she might have felt.
- Children ask their own questions about what happens next- giving emphasis to giving reasons for their answers

### Observations

- Children are using talk gym gestures well
- Children are really beginning to think of their own answers and not repeating previous ideas
- Obvious enjoyment of session is shown throughout.
- The teacher's skill with the whiteboard is a great advantage to the interactive nature of the lesson
- Again there is a lot of interaction, use of gestures talking and explaining ideas in whole class discussion and small group dialogue

### Points to take forward

- Explore working in different groupings - whole class, trios and pairs

## Diary of project teacher

August 2005 - November 2005

This diary charts the progress of a class of 8 boys taught in a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. It gives a good idea of how the work evolved and the teacher's insights into what was happening. It tells the story of the beginning of Talking Round Corners in this class.

## Diary: August 2005

**Week 1:** Talked to the class about rules of discussion and how to engage a listener by using eye contact and waiting until the speaker is finished before answering questions

**Week 2:** As above

## Diary: September 2005

**Week 3:** As above

**Week 4:** First attempt at discussion "Favourite Television Programmes." As expected this was initially trying to begin to put our class rules into practice and this was difficult for some pupils.

**Week 5:** We discussed the Hopscotch theatre group production of "Olaf the Viking" which the class had seen when the company visited the school. The discussion was difficult to guide as some of the pupils just told the story

**Week 6:** The boys appear to be more relaxed at discussion. They are beginning to focus and their listening skills have improved. Three of the boys from the class attended the school pupil council meeting and the D.H.T. was impressed with how confident and coherent they were at putting their views across.

## Diary: October 2005

**Week 7:** Continuing to develop discussion skills and helping my part-time pupil to take more opportunities to join in our discussions.

## End of first term August - October 2005

The class is beginning to focus and they are more ready to contribute. Three of the boys are making a sustained effort however four of the boys are still looking for a "right answer".



## Diary: November 2005

**Week 10:** Our class discussion was recorded on D.V.D. I decided to focus on “The School Pupil Council” and talk about why we have a pupil council and ask pupils to reflect on the benefits to our school.

The boys tried very hard. Three of the group are beginning to engage with the discussion and are showing more ability in developing their ideas.

**Week 11:** The boys are all working hard. During discussion three of the boys appear to be more able to develop their ideas and are making more progress.

**Week 12:** The class is still working on developing discussion skills. Some discussion is of a greater interest to the boys.

**Week 13:** Today we were discussing a visit we had to a restaurant and the pupil who doesn't contribute during discussion at all, for the first time contributed today!!

# Towards Excellence





## Towards Excellence

---

**'Democracies need citizens who can argue, reason, challenge, question, present cases and evaluate them...democracies decline when citizens listen rather than talk, and when they comply rather than debate.'**

Alexander

At the heart of A Curriculum For Excellence lies the aspiration that all children and young people should be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. If we consider our talking, listening and learning project in relation to these four capacities, we can say that :

### **Successful Learners:**

We did not attempt to measure the success of the project in terms of how improving talking and listening in the classroom might impact on attainment in reading and writing. It certainly impacted on their talking and listening skills- as the evaluation report points out, many of the P6/7 children were performing in a way that would have been deemed to have been at least a Standard Grade 'General' had they been assessed using those criteria. Additionally, many teachers felt that reading skills, in particular, were improved by building in much more good quality discussion. What is beyond doubt, is that pupils themselves felt they were learning better.

### **Confident Individuals:**

We started with the aim of building teacher and pupil confidence in using talking and listening in learning. For what better way to encourage a young person to become a confident individual than to listen, and to provide the opportunity to develop their own voice and opinions? The Evaluation report is emphatic that increased teacher and pupil confidence was achieved through the work of the project.

### **Effective Contributors:**

Developing this capacity was of course at the very heart of our work in talking and listening. Building good co-operative learning skills was a major part of our project and teachers as well as learners felt that through developing their skills in listening, encouraging, challenging, building ideas, and reaching consensus their effectiveness as contributors was greatly enhanced.

### **Responsible Citizens:**

Robin Alexander, quoted above has summed it up neatly: unless we help all of our young people to think carefully, to find their voice, and to use it to express their ideas in a powerful and responsible way, we will not develop the citizens that we need to become the democracy that we aim to be.

# Evaluation Report





INVERCLYDE COUNCIL

**Talking, Listening and Learning**  
**in**  
**Inverclyde**

An Evaluation  
by  
Brian Boyd and John Lawson  
University of Strathclyde  
June 2007

*When the teacher asks a question and you put your hands up, someone gets picked and they say their answer. When you discuss it with your thumbs up it goes in all sorts of different directions and you really think about it and understand it better. It's like talking round corners.*

*(P7 pupil, Highlanders' Academy)*



## **Acknowledgements**

We would wish to thank Inverclyde Council for facilitating access to the schools involved in the project and for making DVD footage available. In particular, thanks are due to Fiona Norris, Quality Improvement Officer, for assisting our evaluation and for her boundless energy and enthusiasm for the Talking, Listening and Learning in Inverclyde project. Our gratitude is also due to Dr. Nigel Lawrie who was supportive throughout the project.

## **Contents**

### **Page**

<b>Context and rational:</b>	<b>5</b>
A Curriculum for Excellence	5
Vygotsky in the Modern Classroom	7
Dialogic Teaching	7
<b>The Evaluation process:</b>	<b>11</b>
The Interim Report	11
The Follow-Up	11
The Report	12
<b>Classroom Practice</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The Teachers</b>	<b>26</b>
Teachers Talking	26
The Questionnaires	32
<b>The Headteachers</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>The Pupils</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Local Authority Staff</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Dissemination</b>	<b>64</b>
Other Authorities	64
Other sectors	65
<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>References and Further Reading</b>	<b>73</b>
 <b>Talking, Listening and Learning in Inverclyde</b>	



## *Context and Rationale*

The Talking, Listening and Learning initiative in Inverclyde has taken place against the backdrop of curriculum change in Scotland. This change, itself, reflects a growing interest, world-wide, in how people learn and how schools can enable all young people to fulfil their potential. In a rapidly changing world, it is not enough to teach the content of the curriculum; young people will, increasingly, need to learn how to learn and to be able to apply their learning to new and unanticipated circumstances. Thus, enabling them to be life-long, independent, self-directed learners is a key aim of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is through cooperative learning that we can help them achieve this goal.

## *A Curriculum for Excellence*

*A Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) began the process of shifting the focus from content to pedagogy. It stated that the curriculum 'is concerned both with *what is to be learned* and *how it is taught*' (our emphasis). In addition it introduced three 'new' principles which should underpin the curriculum:

- Depth
- Relevance
- Personalisation and choice.

Finally, its four core purposes all had implications for the role of the teacher in the classroom. The clear implication was that teachers, in classrooms, would make a considerable contribution to each of the four purposes:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Effective contributors
- Responsible citizens

In the past, the concentration in teacher education was on *methodology*, finding the right kinds of strategies that teachers could use to help their pupils learn. There was a belief that once a range of methods had been mastered by the teacher, classroom learning would improve. In recent years, the focus has shifted from teaching to learning, with research on how we learn becoming more accessible and influential. The idea of teachers negotiating learning outcomes with pupils, of giving them the skills to assess their own work and that of their peers, of encouraging them to ask as well as answer questions and of using assessment to improve the learning process, have all become widespread in their use. Thus, as teachers become aware of the rationale for what they do in the classroom and are encouraged to reflect, with colleagues and with pupils, on the efficacy of the approaches used, methodology becomes *pedagogy*; teachers are now willing to engage with educational theory to inform their practice. The emphasis has switched from what do I have to teach about to what do pupils need to learn about and how do can they do so most effectively.



### *Vygotsky in the modern classroom*

Kozoulin and others (1994) have written about 'creating powerful thinkers in teachers and students'. While Piaget argued that conceptual learning could only begin when a certain developmental level was reached, Vygotsky saw the classroom as a place where more structured learning 'itself promotes cognitive development' (p.278).

Vygotsky advanced the principle of 'collectively distributed problem solving' (p. 283). It involves presenting a task so that different groups within the class look at different 'segments' of the problem, thus the interpersonal contact becomes a 'means for achieving the goals of learning' (p.283). The role of the teacher changes in this context. It becomes one of 'advisor and participant' or 'senior member' of the scientific group. Feuerstein (2002) has elaborated Vygotsky's theory and has suggested that the teacher becomes a 'mediator' of the child's learning, in the same way that thoughtful parents turn everyday experiences into opportunities for generalised learning.

For the modern classroom, the key message of Vygotsky and of Feuerstein is that both the teacher and the peer group can mediate learning.

### *Dialogic Teaching*

Robin Alexander's *Towards Dialogic Teaching* (2004) is sub-titled 'Rethinking classroom talk'. The approach is founded on 'the Vygotskian view that the child's

cognitive development also requires it to engage, through the medium of spoken language, with adults, other children and the wider culture' (p.11). Alexander cites as justification for talk in the classroom another Vygotskian concept, that of the 'zone of proximal development' or the gap between what a child can do now and what s/he could do with the help from or mediation by a teacher or a 'more capable peer'. Thus pupil engagement and teacher intervention are at the heart of good classroom learning, and the medium is dialogue. The function of the dialogue is to enable learners to think for themselves and to 'truly understand'. Alexander cites findings from neuroscience which suggest that talk is necessary for the building of the brain itself.

Alexander draws on research studies in England and Wales, from the 1970s to the 1990s, which seemed to show lots of evidence of pupils in primary schools sitting in groups but not working in groups, with very little pupil-led discussion or active problem-solving. These phenomena were evident in studies in the US (Nystrand, 1997) which found very few 'authentic' questions being posed. The 'well, children, I have an answer in my head; can you guess it' routine is one most teachers will recognise and may even squirm slightly at how often we have found ourselves using it. Recent research on the Literacy and Numeracy strategies in England suggest that 'traditional patterns of whole class interaction have not been dramatically transformed by the Strategies'. (p.15).

Alexander cites his own international research to provide a picture of practice in continental Europe where oracy is as important as literacy; where talking is integral to literacy; and where 'oral pedagogy' has a strong tradition. However, he is cautious about what he calls 'international cherry-picking'. He reminds us that in the 1990s,



some academics, famously, visited Pacific Rim countries, observed teacher-led whole-class teaching, and jumped to the conclusions, a) that this is what accounted for the apparent high scores in international tests and spectacular growth in economic success, and b) that the approach would work just as well in this country. Not only did the some of 'tiger economies of the Pacific Rim' crash shortly after these visits, but there was no recognition of the importance of *culture*.

Dialogic teaching is based on a firm theoretical footing which emphasises deep rather than surface learning and which promotes independent thinking and learning through collaborative strategies. Alexander outlines 5 principles of dialogic teaching:

- *Collective*: teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class, rather than in isolation;
- *Reciprocal*: teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints;
- *Supportive*: children articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers; and they help one another to reach common understandings;
- *Cumulative*: teachers and children build on their own and each others' ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry;
- *Purposeful*: teachers plan and facilitate dialogic teaching with particular educational goals in view. (p. 26).

Alexander is keen to make the point that while discussion and dialogue are 'the most cognitively potent elements in the basic repertoire of classroom talk' (p.30), there are

times when teachers may use techniques like rote learning or simple repetition or even the rapid-fire question-and-answer approach. But he is unequivocal when he argues that 'if this is all we do, then children will learn and understand far, far less than they could or should.' (p.30) Put in a nutshell, his philosophy, drawing on a strong tradition from Dewey through Vygotsky to Bruner, is that dialogic teaching 'challenges not only children's understanding but also our own.' (p.29)

There are clear links between this philosophy and that of David Perkins' *teaching for understanding* (1998). Like Perkins, Alexander is unhappy with a pedagogy which only requires learners to 'accept other people's certainties' (p.30) He also makes explicit links between his approach and that of Black and Wiliam (1999) in their advocacy of dialogue and questioning. Indeed, he suggests that the strategies advocated within formative assessment – wait time, informative feedback, a climate of talk and peer- and self-assessment – are 'remarkably similar to those we advance...for dialogic teaching,' (p.30). Another important link he makes is to Citizenship education and he passionately argues that young people who are able to articulate their ideas and hold their own in debate will be much more confident in holding politicians to account. Indeed, although his booklet was written prior to *A Curriculum for Excellence*, it is clear that Alexander would claim that dialogic teaching would go a long way to delivering successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.



## The Evaluation Process

### *The Interim Report*

In August 2006, the present authors produced an Interim Report for the Council, based on visits to all of the schools in which classroom observation and interviews with teachers, headteachers and young people took place. The conclusions were very positive:

*Dialogic teaching may not be the most engaging of titles for an approach to learning and teaching which offers so much promise. It is entirely consistent with Assessment is for Learning and offers a pedagogical route into A Curriculum for Excellence. In essence, it is about empowering all learners, irrespective of the advantages or disadvantages they bring with them to their first experiences of education in early years, by equipping them with the skills to engage in cooperative learning. If Vygotsky's theory of 'social constructivism' is at the heart of many of the current initiatives to improve young people's learning, then this approach gives all learners a powerful framework.*

*The early evidence from the project so far is entirely positive. The Primary 1 and 2 classes provide a bonus which was not entirely unexpected, namely that the earlier this approach is embedded in the learning process the better. Our interim findings are that there are many examples of good practice. The challenges for the future are to embed them in the schools currently involved and then to 're-grow' the practice in pre-school and secondary.*

### *The Follow-Up*

In April and May, 2007, all of the participating schools were re-visited. The researchers swapped schools in the interests of objectivity and balance. All of the schools were visited again, the headteachers, teachers and pupils interviewed and lessons observed, where possible. In addition, a questionnaire was sent to all of the teachers involved (including one who had moved out of the Authority). Finally, interviews were carried out with two key members of the Council staff who had been involved in the project.

### *The Report*

This report follows a similar pattern to the interim report. However, since the audience of this report is likely to be wider than that of the interim report, perhaps, given the interest generated in the project by coverage in the national education press, every attempt has been made not to identify individual schools or teachers. The purpose of the report is to enable the Council to learn from the project; from its successes and from its challenges. Things which might have been more successful are just as useful for future developments as those which worked well.

Throughout the evaluation process, the researchers were invited into schools and classrooms, allowed access to small groups of pupils and given time by hard-pressed teachers and headteachers, all in the interest of sharing practice. The level of professional commitment demonstrated throughout the data-gathering process was



highly commendable. The only problem facing the researchers was how to get out of some schools in time to visit the next one!

## **Classroom Practice**

In every school where it was possible to do so, lessons were observed. In most cases, these were lessons which had been planned anyway; in some, an adjustment had been made to accommodate our visit. The lessons are presented here in a narrative style, to try to capture the dynamic of the occasions. However, every attempt has been made to preserve the anonymity of the people and schools involved. The teachers will undoubtedly recognise themselves but the wider readership will not. No critical comments have been made by the researchers. Any issues arising from the observations are raised in the general section at the end.

In total, we saw 18 lessons. In the interests of some brevity, we summarise our experience of half of these. The lessons we chose to include are not necessarily the “best”; they are simply a representative cross section of the remarkable work which we saw in all the classrooms we visited. Time and again one of us would return from an Inverclyde primary, go straight to the other’s office – and enthuse!

### *Class A*

The lesson lasted some 50 minutes – all of it discussion resulting from a short story. It is unlikely that most secondary teachers would have attempted this with a whole (mixed-ability) class for so long, yet this was a P6. There were occasions when they worked in trios and every trio (all 9 of them) fed back. On one or two occasions it looked as if concentration was waning, but the teacher got it back each time.



The pupils could articulate the 'rules' and say why they were important. The teacher reminded them occasionally of the rules. The teacher felt this kind of discussion was a good preparation for written work especially for those who found it difficult (though it was impossible to detect these pupils in the discussion situation). All pupils were involved. The teacher was able to prompt the pupils from time to time but it was not needed often.

The pupils accommodated me and let me join their discussions without any problems.

#### *Class B*

It was a P3/4 composite class. The teacher read a folk tale from Robert Fisher's book, *Stories for Thinking*. The pupils rehearsed the rules of group work for my benefit.

The task was for pupils, in 2s, 3s or 4s (the pupils thought that the composition was to do with who could work well together), to make up two sets of questions on the story which they would give to another group. The first set was to be factual, the second more challenging around the central issue of the story, 'beauty'.

The Pupils were on task for 40 minutes or so with minimal teacher intervention. They used the Dialogic Teaching approach with one another even when the teacher was not present (thumbs up, etc.). The task was a challenging one, especially the second part of it. Some struggled more than others; but all stuck to it. The teacher intervened

with a very light touch, occasionally going to a group with looked 'stuck' and even scribing for one of the pupils who needed it. The pupils' questions were swapped over to other groups, and answered. The teacher did a recap and consolidation.

It was very impressive and pupils clearly understood the principles underpinning the approach.

### *Class C*

There were 11 pupils in this P1 group and they were discussing, in the round from an initial stimulus, what their garden might look like. The teacher engaged in sustained questioning of pupils – often persisting with individuals to 'deepen the dialogue' and using higher order, 'What do you think? / What if? / Why?' questions with this group of five year olds. Both the pupils and the teacher were using the 'talk gym' actions and there were several instances when pupils felt confident enough to venture, *I don't agree...* and offer their point of view. The teacher invited empathy by asking a number of questions about feelings.

Following this, the class divided into trios and completed a sequencing task. Before beginning this, the teacher asked them to tell me why working in trios was a good thing. They readily offered that talking to each other helped them to, *think out loud / share ideas / do better work.*



### *Class D*

This P3 group had been part of the project from the start and although the work in P1 had been impressive, there was a marked difference in the oral ability, confidence and awareness of the teacher's expectations.

Again, for my benefit, they explained that, *We share ideas / Don't keep good things in our brains to ourselves*. Going on, they explained that they don't accept one word answers and that they should expand on and explain their answers. Overall they were clear about the 'rules' and why they matter - e.g. the importance of good eye contact at interviews.

The class then went on to continue work in trios planning an inversion of the Little Red Riding Hood story. The stress had to be on feelings. Before the discussion started some spokespeople read out the start of their story and explained how this helped establish the genre (they didn't use the word but understood the concept that a fairy story sounds different from other kinds of stories).

### *Class E*

This was a group of 9 P4 pupils. After an introduction which recapped TLL principles and mapped the lesson with clear WALT and WILF on the board (targets were to think, then discuss, then explain) the class divided into one trio and three pairs. Their task was to pick a card with a question on it (e.g. 'Why is bread cheap and

chocolate not?') think about the statement, discuss it and come up with a convincing explanation for the rest of the class.

The groups worked very well together and all of them were able to report back with thoughtful answers to their question. In the course of the feedbacks, the teacher pushed the groups hard on reasoning, using 'devil's advocate' type statements / questions and, on two very skilfully managed occasions in particular, deepening the dialogue with reporters. She didn't accept wrong answers, simply telling the group that this was not so and redirecting / supporting their thinking.

The lesson was rounded off with the four sets of questions which the groups had used becoming a sequencing task. The purpose of this task was to turn the questions into a poem

#### *Class F*

The learning intentions were shared with this P1 class:

- We are learning to reflect on our opinion
- Explain our answers.

The class were read a story, 'Kate's Choice', in which the character had to decide if she should tell on her friend Tom for stealing a box of chocolates from the corner shop for his mum who was in hospital.



The class discussed Tom's contention that it was OK to do this, as he had no money. There were lots of thumbs in response to the teacher's questions – all of which were thinking questions. On at least two occasions, the teacher persisted with a single pupil by deepening the dialogue and asking three quite demanding questions in a row.

The pupils then went into pairs to discuss more questions:

- Is there a good excuse for Tom to steal?
- Is it OK to borrow without asking?
- Should Kate tell her parents? Why might it be OK to keep it a secret? What is a secret?
- How do you think Kate feels? How do you feel? What word would you use to describe how you feel? (She got 'miserable')

Overall, this P1 sustained the thinking / questioning / explaining activity – *about moral dilemmas* - for 45 minutes. This was an outstanding lesson. (Mr Piaget would have been quite perplexed.)

### *Class G*

This was a P6 class of 23 pupils. They were comparatively new to the project and were being eased into it in 'McCrone time' by a teacher experienced in the project from last session. They were comparing the traditional 'Goldilocks' story to the Roald

Dahl subversive version. The focus of the lesson was on characterisation (Goldilocks). The methodology was complex and demanding with a number of stations, each with a different collaborative task which served to examine the character. (Character Pizza / Question Stems / Venn Diagram / Character Web.)

Before the activity began, the teacher stressed that there were no right or wrong answers – only answers which could be explained / justified. She was experimenting with not appointing group leaders on the basis that the ‘talk gym’ strategies meant that whoever was speaking *was* the leader. (Good point if you think about thumbs and passing on.) She explained to me that she was trying to instil a sense of joint responsibility for maintaining the impetus of the discussion.

The extent to which the tasks generated genuine discussion and the pupils’ ability to interact effectively with each other was impressive. Interestingly, the teacher (who had been one of those at the forefront of this development last session and had recently returned from maternity leave) felt that, compared to where her class had reached last session, this group still had some way to go. For example, she perceived an impetus in the pupils to get everything on paper; a sort of programmed requirement that, if it matters, it gets written down. This provides an interesting comparison with the P3 class in the same school who, in their second year of the project, clearly understood that talking *is* learning.



### *Class H*

This was a P7 class of 19 pupils who were in semi-debate mode on the question of school uniform. The focus of the lesson was *listening to challenge or support*. The group were in a circle and the lesson began with two solo talks, one each for and against school uniform. Unlike a traditional debate, however, the talks simply acted as stimulus into whole class discussion of the issue. First of all the two speakers were put in the 'hot seat' then the discussion was widened to the whole class.

This would have been a hugely impressive lesson in any P7: in this school, with an FME in excess of 45% in an area of significant deprivation, it was marvellous.

The two speakers (who, according to the teacher and headteacher, had previously lacked confidence and would not speak up in class) were, in Standard Grade English terms, certainly at General level for solo talk and, at least, borderline 3. The discussion was sustained for about 25 minutes with lots of good challenging questions, which were met with detailed answers. A number of pupils came in with substantial points in support of both sides and simple yes / no responses were not acceptable: justification / explanation / exemplification were required. The clear understanding shown by pupils that refutation involved explaining *why* they believed someone was wrong was impressive. There was also some discussion which showed considerable subtlety: e.g. the distinction between a uniform and a dress code. This actually became quite philosophical about the implications of coercion on the one hand and democratic decision making on the other.

After the discussion, the teacher asked the class to reflect how well they – and she – had done. The class felt that the teacher had done very well! She had not dominated and had used her thumbs to take her turn. One pupil reflected, without awkwardness on anyone's part, how much another pupil had improved.

For my benefit, they explained how they felt they had improved:

*I've moved up a reading group....feel more confident, it's OK to be wrong.*

*I think properly because of doing it out loud.*

*I've learned to cooperate with others.*

*...nicer happier place to be. Now all the girls and boys talk together...*

*Used to be pure scared to put your hand up.....don't mind the teacher saying I'm wrong because it's the truth.....learn by mistakes.*

Pupil 1            *What if no teachers in secondary don't use TLL?*

Pupil 2            *We could just do it ourselves in groups and teach others in the group  
how to do it.*

Some other interesting observations from the pupils were that it can and should be used for other subjects. For instance, they had imposed their TLL strategies on Art



where they were expected to work as a team (with no direction?). Also teachers should use it at staff meetings to get things done better!

### *Class I*

There were 21 pupils in this P1 group and they were working on a theme of 'Alien at School'. Ultimately, the class had to come up with one rule for the classroom and one for the playground, which they would have to explain to the alien.

The class was in a horseshoe shape and the teacher spent a lot of time eliciting what pupils understood about rules: not just what the school rules are but what they're *for*. Before the discussion, there was a brief recap of 'talk gym' rules and when the teacher was about to start, all the pupils were focused with their 'thinking fists' on ready to go.

This was a P1 but the teacher engaged in a considerable amount of 'deepening the dialogue,' persisting with three, and on one occasion four questions with the same pupil. None of the pupils who were pushed in this way appeared at all concerned by this concentrated questioning and went along with it confidently. A good illustration of this was when groups were reporting back. One reporter said, *I chose....* The teacher really pushed her on *who* chose (she wanted *we* not *I*) and why *they* had chosen this rule.

Another remarkable aspect of this feedback was that the teacher introduced the concept of refutation (but didn't use the word). Pupils were expected to listen to each

group's conclusions and if they didn't agree, they were to say so – without hurting anyone's feelings – and explain why.

On two occasions pupils did this – and it was P1!

### *Class J*

This was a P7 class of 17 pupils. By way of introduction, the teacher, who has long been an advocate of collaborative working, asked the class to explain to me why this is an effective way to work. One boy put it in a nutshell, *Because it makes us better learners.*

The class had been working on a really challenging series of lessons on war. The lesson began with a video of the London blitz which allowed the teacher to engage in detailed whole-class questioning in order to establish previous knowledge/ learning. She then outlined the WALT and WILF of the lesson - which were to listen to the lyrics of the Nerina Pallot song, 'Everybody's Gone to War' and be able to offer a personal response to the song's lyrics. After this they had to consider the following in their trios:

- List the advantages of living in peace with others.
- What causes conflict between countries?
- Can there ever be a good reason to go to war?



- Winston Churchill said, “Jaw jaw is better than war war.” What do you think he meant?

The initial whole-class discussion on the lyrics began slowly but really took off as pupils started to discuss, in real depth, the idea of the futility and hopelessness of war. At one point the discussion got round to what Bin Laden’s motivation might be. The teacher really pushed and challenged the class on this: really good stuff here from P7!

At all times when discussing / reporting back as a class, it was clear that the pupils understood that they were expected to think, listen and interact with each other. This generated some good building and chaining of ideas among the class, *I’ve got something to add to Mark’s.....* . Throughout the discussion in trios and as a class, the teacher was pushing pupils to expand / explain / justify.

## **The Teachers**

The teachers involved in the project were volunteers and so might be said not to be a representative sample of Inverclyde's primary staff. However, there was a range within the group of teaching experience, of involvement in CPD and of teaching styles. None of them had any prior knowledge or experience in Dialogic Teaching. Thus, the project was a journey for all of the teachers involved.

In the first part of this section, the words of the teachers themselves, as captured by the researchers, tell the story of this journey. The second part is a synthesis of the questionnaires completed by the teachers at the end of the project.

### *A. Teachers Talking*

#### *Teacher 1*

The project has 'changed her teaching' ...in a positive way!

At first she confined the approach to Language work, then infused it through the curriculum... 'there was no going back'. There was support from her colleague, from the HT and from the Authority. The CPD was really helpful.

The pupils now understood the principles as well as the 'rules' and the quality of their learning had improved (though, as yet, there is no quantitative evidence for that). The



quality of their discussion has improved immeasurably. They are now discussing in ways which are almost philosophical! The pupils are now better thinkers.

Some of the pupils have used the approach in their buddying work with P1.

#### *Teacher 2*

The skills have transferred to other aspects of the pupils' work, e.g. in whole-school, ethos contexts. They have:

- Skills
- Confidence
- Clarity of thought

It began in Social Subjects in P6 and across the curriculum in P7. It has carried over into Citizenship and into Enterprise.

#### *Teacher 3*

The teacher feels that one of the main strengths of the project is that it challenges pupils' language and reasoning skills – especially as she feels that many of them don't experience a linguistically enriching home environment.

She believes that a fundamental difference in her practice is that she now has a mandate to devote time to talking and listening, rather than having pupils with heads buried in jotters producing evidence of 'work'.

This teacher has provided CPD on the project for all her colleagues in the school. She feels that the strategies should become embedded across the curriculum as previously there was no transfer of skills.

#### *Teacher 4*

In the teacher's opinion the fundamental difference in her practice can be seen in the fact that she listens much more to what pupils say in order to support and challenge: to make them *think*. She believes that her questioning has improved dramatically and that there are far fewer 'ping-pong' question-and-answer sessions.

Another fundamental difference is that she now looks for quality, not quantity in pupils' writing. Before, a P3 might have 25 pieces of writing in their folders by the end of the session. This session her P3s will have about 8 pieces – but of significantly better quality. She acknowledges that she's fortunate to have a headteacher who appreciates this and supports her in it.

She asserts, beyond doubt, that the pupils' confidence has grown well beyond the level of previous classes she has taught at this stage.



#### *Teacher 5*

The teacher feels that the fundamental difference the project has brought about in her practice is that her teaching is now completely pupil centred. When planning lessons she now does so on the basis of what *pupils* might do and say, rather on what *she* might do or say. Overall her lessons have become much more collaborative and interactive.

In terms of 're-growing good practice' her headteacher has planned for her to co-op teach with colleagues throughout the school in order to promote the TLL strategies and model the practice.

#### *Teacher 6*

This member of staff had been using the approach for around 2 years. She used the Robert Fisher material a lot and had previously been trained in The Learning Game. She felt TLL overlapped with TLG, AifL and thinking skills. She felt TLL added value to the Robert Fisher materials and could be applied in all areas of the curriculum. She even used the approach when working out the class Code of Conduct and felt the approach delivered *transfer* of learning. She identified a pupil whose approach to learning had been transformed by TLL, including her behaviour.

She felt the CPD provided as part of the project was excellent . She admitted to having been sceptical at first, but was now behind it. Her understanding of the rationale was now better. The pupils were now asking questions, not just her. They can discuss better and know the difference between open and closed questions.

She felt the next step was to roll it out across the school but felt that the in-service should be given to all staff...in all primary schools. She felt that P7 pupils should be given opportunities to show the secondary staff what they are capable of.

Making the issue of questions and questioning explicit was at the heart of the approach. Then teachers would have the confidence to let things go and to be able to use the approach in areas such as Maths problem-solving.

#### *Teacher 7*

Teachers working in pairs is a great strategy. They can share insights and look at things that seem to work in one class but not in another. It is time-consuming at first (many hours, after school, having been spent on preparation).

The next stage ought to be providing models for other schools to look at; building on the Robert Fisher books; a CPD pack for schools to use in-house. She felt that all staff could use the approach, since it linked with AifL, *A Curriculum for Excellence* and problem-solving. It could start in P1, in all areas of the curriculum but not as



separate TLL lessons – *infused* into the curriculum (as well as initiatives such as Enterprise).

#### *Teacher 8*

The teacher feels that one of the fundamental differences brought about in her practice has been the extent to which she has developed her questioning skills. She feels that the CPD on Bloom's taxonomy, which has developed into the use of 'question fans,' has been a great help in this area. She believes that this CPD has not only helped in raising her awareness of challenging pupils' thinking by using higher order questions (n.b. this is a P1 teacher) but also by supplying a range of 'openers' for these questions.

Overall, she feels that her practice has changed significantly. Previously, there would have been much more teacher-led discussion with more superficial question and answer routines. She believes that there is much more pupil-pupil interaction in her class and that, as stated earlier, she now challenges pupils' thinking much more effectively through her questioning.

#### *Teacher 9*

This teacher has been an advocate of collaborative working and, as such, welcomes the validation that the project has given to this methodology and the mandate that it has given teachers to take the time to do it well. She enjoyed the CPD and, as other

teachers have mentioned, found the input on Bloom and the idea of 'question fans' really helpful in terms of refining her practice.

This teacher has recently moved to trios for group sessions but tries to mix them in terms of traditional judgements of 'ability'. She points out that the best readers and writers aren't necessarily the best in discussion.

### *B. The Questionnaire*

In May 2007, a questionnaire was completed by each of the fourteen teachers working on the project. The questionnaire asked them to reflect on how their practice has changed in the course of the project and if they believed that, as a result, better learning was taking place in their classrooms. They were asked to consider the contexts they create for talking and listening within their classrooms, how the organisation and dynamic of small group discussion has changed and what benefits, they feel, have accrued in terms of pupils' individual talk skills. Participants were also invited to reflect on the success of the project in general and on any aspects of the project about which they felt they had more to say.

#### *A. Contexts for Talking and Listening*

*1. Estimate the approximate percentages of time you now spend on the following kinds of talking and listening for learning activities and consider how you feel these percentages have changed over the course of the project:*



- *whole-class*;
- *small-group (teacher-led)*;
- *small-group (pupil-led)*;
- *individual (pupil)*

In terms of whole-class discussion, the responses were mainly in the 30% - 35% range, with two teachers estimating in the 40% - 50% range. In all but one case, individual work gained the lowest percentage, tending to be in the 10% - 25% range: the odd one out estimated that 30% of time was spent working individually.

Overwhelmingly, teachers indicated a roughly equal split of the remaining time (roughly 40% - 50%) being taken up with teacher-led or pupil-led small group discussion. Where there wasn't an even split between the two, teacher-led small-group discussion tended to predominate.

When commenting on these figures, all the participants believe that they are now spending more time promoting learning through talking and listening than they did before the project began. Many also observe that the percentage of time spent on such activities has continued to increase as the project has progressed, commenting on the diminishing dominance of the teacher and the corresponding increase in pupils taking control of discussion. Although the overwhelming majority stress the significant increase in pupil-led activities, one teacher feels that the project has helped develop her skills in terms of facilitating whole-class dialogue and prefers this form of interaction.

2. *Has the layout or organisation of your classroom changed over the course of the project? If so, how?*

The most common response to this question was that teachers are now using horseshoe layout (and occasionally circles) for whole class activities. The reason for this is to allow pupils to make better eye contact with each other and to facilitate what participants have come to refer to as 'talk gym' (thumbs etc.). Many teachers stressed the need for flexibility and commented on how their pupils now regard it as the norm to re-arrange desks from the whole-class horseshoe into groups / trios / pairs.

3. *i) How has TLL affected how you manage whole-class discussion?*

All participants responded that there is now much more pupil-led discussion than previously, with pupils using 'talk gym' actions to pass discussion between them. Teachers are now taking more of a back seat as pupils grow in confidence and sustain the interaction by questioning each other, sharing, chaining and building ideas with much less teacher intervention. Rather than the 'guess what's in the teacher's head' / 'right answer' convention, there is much more emphasis on discussion. 'Thinking time' is being promoted and wrong answers are being used to promote further thinking / discussion.

Interestingly, a number of participants commented that now they are more able to sit back and observe discussions (as pupils take responsibility for their own learning)



they are in a better position to observe and reflect on pupils' progress and pinpoint development needs in individuals.

Another excellent point made is that small-group discussion, *immediately before class discussion*, actually facilitates the concept of 'thinking time' by allowing pupils to think out loud to each other, clarifying ideas and promoting the confidence to contribute in the larger whole-class situation.

ii) *Has TLL altered how the ground rules are established in your classroom for whole-class, teacher-led discussion?*

All participants comment on how pupils have participated in establishing the rules for discussion. 'Talk gym' actions have helped consolidate and sustain these rules and many teachers, as well as having the rules displayed on the wall, recap these briefly with pupils before discussions. An important factor in why pupils stick to these rules (some teachers report that pupils used to 'forget' the teacher's rules quite quickly) is that they understand what they're for and why they're important.

iii) *How has TLL helped you to encourage extended (rather than one-word) answers?*

There was an overwhelmingly positive response here – with considerable use of exclamation marks! Teachers are aware that they are questioning better by challenging pupils to think, to offer extended answers and to justify responses. Reference is made to the CPD input which focused on Bloom's Taxonomy, with

teachers much more aware of using higher order questions – ‘What do you think? / Why? / What if?.....’

Teachers have worked at developing pupils’ own questioning skills: one class has come up with the slogan - *Don’t waste a question!*

*iv) Has TLL helped pupils to offer alternative or additional answers to questions?*

There is a view among participants that pupil confidence has grown in the course of the project. As a consequence, they are much more likely to venture an opinion – or disagree with something – than they would in the past. The ethos of the project, listen to what others have to say / show respect / ask ‘Why?’ / justify answers..... has bolstered pupils’ willingness to think and to speak out without fear of being wrong or being ridiculed. Importantly, pupils have shown that they are willing to change their opinions / views in the light of what others have said.

*v) How has TLL enabled pupils to build on one another’s answers, expanding on points, explaining in more detail, justifying their own point of view, etc?*

Children now know that this is expected of them and understand that it helps them to be better learners. There has been significant emphasis on linking and ‘chaining’ of ideas. A number of teachers comment on the fact that, in the past, pupils tended to repeat what others had said, now they know that they should be trying to question what has been said and / or build on it. As suggested earlier, the increase in pupils’



confidence and the ethos of the project – which has given pupils the right to have a ‘voice’ – has contributed greatly here.

Teachers of P1 classes observe that building on others’ ideas is very challenging and their pupils are not quite at the stage of doing it independently. One P1 teacher has introduced the idea of ‘adding-on’ (‘Can anyone add-on to this idea?’) and is working at it ‘quite formally’. However, some P1 pupils are beginning to understand that it’s important to be able to explain your answers to questions such as, ‘What do you think about what he said...? / Why do you think....?’

One very experienced teacher of pupils with additional support needs reports that the more able pupils within her class (of ten) are beginning to link and develop discussion. This is new in her experience of teaching such pupils.

*vi) Has TLL changed how you respond to ‘right’ answers?*

Pupils now accept that a single ‘right’ answer isn’t enough. The expectation is always there that they will think about it in order to build on it / ask questions about it / challenge it. Teachers are aware that they should avoid saying, ‘good / right / that’s it.....’ as such words and phrases send signals that they have the answer they want and it’s time to move on. As pupils become more experienced in TLL strategies – and as they gain in confidence – many seem to enjoy the challenge of being pushed a bit further in their thinking.

*vii) Has TLL changed how you respond to ‘wrong’ answers?*

This is seen as a very positive aspect of the project: offering a 'wrong' answer is not regarded as any sort of stigma and this gives the children confidence to offer ideas without any pressure. In terms of learning, wrong answers can often be used to challenge pupils' thinking by having them explain why an answer is wrong and use it as a starting point to build towards a 'right' answer and an understanding of why it's right. One teacher comments that this has raised her awareness of not using questions just to test children's knowledge but of using them to develop their thinking. In the past, most participants would have told a pupil that an answer was wrong but wouldn't, necessarily, have used it as a springboard into further discussion.

Teachers comment that the ethos of TLL supports them in saying that an answer is wrong because pupils understand that they're not getting a row, that they haven't 'failed' and that a wrong answer might simply be the first step on the way to a 'right' answer.

One teacher welcomes the reassurance that, "Saying, 'No' is not akin to some form of child cruelty!!"

*viii) Does TLL help if, initially, there are no answers to a given question?*

Teachers say that TLL CPD has helped them reflect on the kind of questions they ask and on how they might rephrase these questions in order to evoke more response.

Stress on 'thinking time' is really important here: pupils now know how to reflect on



what they have heard. They don't panic because they know that the class and the teacher will work through it to find an answer.

*ix) How does TLL help you to monitor the pupils who actively engage and those who don't?*

TLL ties in with AifL strategies – particularly in terms of sharing criteria and self / peer assessment. Because pupils are frequently self-directed and reflecting on their own and others' performance, the teacher is left in a more 'hands-free' situation to monitor, support and challenge as appropriate. Some teachers also point out that 'talk gym' – e.g. the 'thinking fists' - gives them a visual check on whether or not pupils are engaged.

In the horseshoe, the teacher can monitor those who are less engaged, while in smaller groups – particularly pairs and trios - it is much more difficult for pupils to opt out. Additionally, it is part of the ethos of TLL that pupils encourage each other's participation and good behaviour.

#### *4. Small-group discussion*

*i) Has TLL affected the criteria you use to form the groups for such discussions?*

Eleven of the fourteen responses state that they prefer mixed ability groups. For some this is a continuation of how they worked in the past, for others it is a change in philosophy as, previously, they had tended to set groups by ability in different areas of the curriculum. Among the reasons given for preferring mixed-ability groupings are:

- a number of teachers are discovering that there's not always a direct correlation between pupils' abilities in the traditional '3Rs' and their oral / aural abilities;
- a mix of personalities can be more useful than a mix of 'abilities';
- allowing groups to change / vary depending on the topic / outcome takes better account of pupil needs and interests;
- giving pupils responsibility for their learning might well be extended to giving them responsibility for choosing their groupings;
- pupils simply enjoy the variety.

The three returns which didn't explicitly state a preference for mixed-ability groupings did so for a variety of reasons:

- 'able' pupils, who tend to dominate, are challenged more by being in a trio together;
- learning in areas such as social studies seems to occur better in mixed-ability



groups, whereas learning in language / reading might occur better in set groupings;

- flexibility is important, change criteria for the groupings depending on subject / outcome – sometimes mixed, sometimes set by ability, sometimes by personality....

*ii) Has TLL provided useful training in the skills of group discussion for the pupils?*

All fourteen responses are very strongly in the affirmative here. Many begin with ‘Yes! / Definitely / Absolutely!’ One response which sums up the general positive attitude of participants says, ‘I can’t stress enough how positive an impact TLL has had on the training of discussion skills. It has been an amazing process to watch and be part of.’

While some participants comment on the confidence which the project has bred in pupils who were previously anxious or reluctant to talk, others reflect on the socialisation process which is giving pupils skills for life.

At the heart of the responses is the sense that the pupils have been given not only a sort of acceptable (to them) code of conduct for their interactions (the ‘talk gym’) but also an understanding, in a metacognitive sense, of what actually makes a good discussion (listen; make eye-contact; ask good questions; explain; justify; expand....).

## *B. Individual Talk*

*Has TLL helped with individual talk skills? Given that its main emphasis is on group talk and listening, is there any transfer of skills to individual talk?*

The most common response here goes back to the point already made several times by participants – *confidence*.

An important element of the TLL ethos is respect for others' opinions: someone talks the others listen and think. This applies equally in group and individual talk situations and pupils have come to accept this. Consequently, the fear of being ridiculed has diminished dramatically among pupils. It is worth noting that two teachers comment on the increase in confidence among pupils who have speech problems, some of whom receive additional support from a speech therapist.

Participants also reflect on the cross-over of skills. Pupils have learned to listen better and now, in some cases, are listening to individual talks in order to ask questions. In terms of content, pupils understand about explaining, expanding, justifying and this is being carried into individual presentations. Additionally, pupils' social interaction has improved so they are more aware of eye-contact, pitch, volume and body language when presenting individually.

## *C. General*



*i) Has TLL had any impact on your confidence in using talking and listening to help pupils learn more effectively? If so, in what ways?*

All participants agree that their confidence in this area has increased in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons:

- there is a greater awareness of the impact of talking and listening on thinking – and therefore on learning;
- the theoretical, research-based underpinning of the CPD;
- support of the group has been a major factor in building teacher confidence;
- social learning is natural and effective;
- teachers' confidence in their own questioning has increased due to CPD (references to Bloom);
- increased confidence in scaffolding dialogue and 'digging deeper';
- a feeling that the old 'oracy' scheme was inadequate but now pupils are engaged in *real* listening in a variety of real contexts for a variety of real purposes;
- a sense that they have a mandate to include talking and listening in all their lessons;

- a number of participants comment on the improvement in reading levels among their pupils, due to there being much more discussion about what's being read (rather than answering questions on it in their jotters?);
- positive, measurable results bolster confidence that teachers are doing the right thing.

*ii) If there were barriers to promoting learning through talking and listening before the project started, how has TLL helped?*

There are two main threads running through most of the responses here. The first of these is the idea that teachers have been given a mandate to take the time and do this well. The old perception (not necessarily among those taking part) that talking and listening are simply bolt-ons to an overcrowded curriculum has been overtaken by the validation that effective talking and listening are at the heart of learning. The second of these threads is, once again, the increase in pupil confidence - which is alluded to time and again, throughout their responses, by all the participants.

TLL has:

- provided pupils with acceptable and understandable rules to support talking and listening;
- established an ethos which has contributed to an increase in pupil confidence;



- helped gain acceptance at national, local and management level of the time needed to do this well;
- lifted the ‘stigma’ of, ‘if you’re not writing about it, it’s not real work’;
- helped overcome the barrier of where to fit talking and listening into the curriculum – there is now an understanding that it permeates.

*iii) Have your hopes and expectations of this Talking, Listening and Learning project been fulfilled?*

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to this question with a number of teachers answering that their expectations have been exceeded. All teachers believe they have benefitted from it while some assert that it has brought about a fundamental and lasting change to their teaching.

As with the pupils, many of the teachers involved in the project say that they have grown in confidence both in terms of their willingness to ‘let go’ more in the classroom and in terms of their own professional standing. The CPD and the theoretical underpinning of the project have given many of the teachers a ‘voice’: they feel that they have accrued substantial pedagogical knowledge and are capable of disseminating this among colleagues. (Most already have - at national, local or school level.)

A number of teachers made reference to the amount and quality of support they received from their headteacher, from Fiona Norris and from Jess Carroll.

Most of the comments represented above reflect our observation in the Interim report of June 2006:

*Teachers' responses when interviewed after observed lessons and to the questionnaire would suggest that they have valued the formal CPD input to the project, have benefited from the support visits from Fiona Norris and Jess Carroll and enjoyed the sharing of experience which takes place on recall days. All teachers report that they feel they have enhanced their professional skills and it is clear that, to varying degrees, all have taken intellectual and professional satisfaction from the process.*

However, the one spectre looming over their achievements is the fear of what will happen to their pupils when they move on and up.

#### *Any Further Comments?*

Eight of the participants took the opportunity to add further comments and these are recorded, in full, below:

- The notion of the 'reflective teacher' is certainly a feature of the TLL project. In terms of the pupils, they have tapped into an element of their own ability which, prior to TLL, was never really recognised.



- Pupils who have not shone on paper shine in discussion and have visibly grown in confidence.
- Not all 'able' pupils perform well and they see that others have opinions which are worth listening to, even when they are in the 'bottom groups'.
- 'Middle of road pupils' are taking part more and even pupils with Record of Needs take part.
- Greater cooperation and respect during lessons (even if it doesn't last). Pupils more aware of body language issues etc.
- Much better answers – more insightful, reflective.
- I think it will be so important to keep the momentum going with this project. I don't want other teachers and pupils to miss out.
- The camcorder has been very useful in helping my pupils look at how they use gesture and body language – and how they sound.'
- Hugely worthwhile experience, sometimes hampered by a lack of on-site colleagues with whom to engage in professional dialogue on a day-to-day basis.

- As I have worked through the pilot with my class from P6-P7, they have had a great chance to work on their skills. These speak for themselves as the children are confident individuals. I hope they get the chance to further their skills in secondary school.
- I have been so lucky to be involved in such a successful project.
- Many thanks to Fiona and all involved in this wonderful pilot. I look forward to the launch of the project and the ensuing impact it will have for all.



## The Headteachers

It is generally accepted in the literature on the management of change (Dunlop and Boyd, 2007) that the role of the headteacher is crucial as enabler or inhibitor of change. The leadership role in creating a culture where innovation can flourish, in supporting collaborative practice and in providing the time and space for teachers to support one another, are all well documented. In this project, it was no different. As we have seen, teachers spoke positively of the support of headteachers. In this section, we look at what the heads themselves had to say, albeit in a slightly more truncated section than the others. Headteachers are notoriously difficult to pin down for lengthy periods of time and some of the 'interviews' took place on-the-hoof!

### *Headteacher i)*

This headteacher was proud of the pupils and of her staff. She felt that what they were engaged in was a kind of Action Research, a process which was under-used and undervalued in schools. There had been a time in the not-too-distant past when there had been a thriving national network of Action Researchers; perhaps a funding mechanism, not unlike Assessment is for Learning, could foster more work of this kind.

She felt strongly that she should try to encourage teachers to go into one another's classrooms (rather than the pre-arranged SMT visits which seemed to predominate in the present climate).

*Headteacher ii)*

She is hugely supportive of, and enthusiastic about, the project. She sees the fundamental difference between this and other initiatives as being her three teachers having a real sense of ownership of the project - not only buying into it but also being part of its development and growth.

She particularly likes the ethos created of shared responsibility for learning – pupil / pupil; teacher / pupil. She sees clear links to good practice enshrined in *A Curriculum for Excellence* and Assessment is for Learning. In terms of accountability, her own dictum is, 'Heads have to empower teachers, not keep looking for bits of paper.'

In her school, TLL is now embedded in P1,2,3,6,7. It will be introduced to P4 and 5 by using experienced teachers in a co-operative role, and in McCrone time cover.

Her one 'Big question' is... 'Will secondaries pick up on this good practice?'

*Headteacher iii)*

Although she was being supportive of the project and was using the teacher to 'cascade' to the rest of the staff, she spoke of 'initiative burnout'. With eight priorities on her development plan, she and the staff were under significant pressure. She was aware of the need to be clear that the purpose of this project is to underpin good practice by developing teacher skills and promoting more effective learning –



rather than being another bolt-on and discrete area of the curriculum. A teacher in this school did talk about the need for permeation and transfer of skills.

The headteacher made the valid point that 'parents expect full trays' and that there is a place for educating parents about the project. It's interesting that other headteachers interviewed accepted the quality not quantity argument while, perhaps, not anticipating parental perceptions of less than full trays. This is clearly a key issue for the schools; if 'evidence' needed for accountability purposes is paper-based, and this approach promotes more discussion and dialogue, then there is a potential clash.

#### *Headteacher iv)*

The headteacher, is very enthusiastic about, and supportive of, the project and understands that it is about developing good practice, not 'bolting on' something extra. He was aware of the relevance of this initiative to *A Curriculum for Excellence* and *Assessment is for Learning* and he had a very clear view of how it might help underpin these, asserting that he is totally committed to developing TLL strategies across the school. To this end he intends to use the teacher involved to support other teachers and to model strategies. He also anticipates making substantial use of the development pack which Fiona Norris and others are writing for the authority.

#### *Headteacher v)*

The headteacher of this school is clearly committed to the principles and ethos of TLL.  
(One of the first things she did was produce her 'question fan' from her desk drawer.)

She is enthusiastic about the contribution the project can make in terms of the ACE 'capacities' and has already seen a marked difference in some of her more difficult pupils in terms of their willingness to become 'effective contributors' and in terms of their general socialisation. She also talked at some length on the contribution TLL can make to AifL strategies. Importantly, she sees TLL as being integral to effective learning.

In terms of development, she will use the teachers in her school who are presently engaged in the project to 'cascade'. However, she believes that the TLL resource which will come from the authority in August - and the accompanying CPD sessions - will be crucial if TLL is to become embedded in, at least, the authorities primary schools.



## **The Pupils**

The pupils appear throughout this report, in the lessons observed, in the discussions with teachers, in the DVD footage – and in their voices, which we have italicised. It was not always possible in the time available to interview groups of pupils about their experience of the project, but occasionally schools found time and gave the researchers the opportunity to talk with them about Talking, Listening and Learning. This account of an impromptu interview, arranged on the spur of the moment by the headteacher (three of the six pupils had their PE gear on!) was a remarkable experience.

### **Interview with pupils**

Six pupils (3 P6 and 3 P7) met with the researcher in the Headteacher's room, unplanned, for around 30 minutes.

Thorough the discussion, they used their skills and techniques developed by TLL. They put thumbs up or down, not in a demonstrative way, but patiently, naturally, as if that was the only civilised way of ensuring that everyone, including the researcher, got a turn. They articulated the principles and the practices of TLL. They talked about 'thinking' and its importance in learning. They discussed the concept of intelligences and how different pupil had different strengths. They understood the reason why it would be appropriate for a pupil with a good understanding of a topic might work with one who didn't and why both would benefit. They were aware of how difficult it might be for someone who did not understand to be asked in front of the whole class, a question without being ready to answer it.

They explained the benefits of this approach to cooperative group discussion. They built on one other's comments, supported one another, took turns, challenged one another's ideas but in a non-critical way, and so on. They discussed with me the rationale for TLL, the importance of collaborative learning, the need to work with others who are less confident, the ethos of the classroom. They seemed to have internalised Vygotsky!

We discussed the challenges of transition to secondary. They were unsure whether secondary teachers would know about their work in the primary school, not just in the classroom but the way in which they ran assemblies, planning the content, introducing visiting speakers and giving votes of thanks. The confidence which working in this way had given them might or might not be acknowledged.

At the end, one of the P7 pupils, a 'sparky' boy with trendy, spiky hair, spontaneously thanked the researcher on behalf of all the pupils (each of whom he referred to by name) for coming to talk to them and for taking an interest in their work.

They were brilliant!



## **Local Authority staff**

### **Fiona Norris**

The driving force behind the Talking, Listening and Learning project was Fiona Norris, Quality Improvement Officer (QIO). Throughout the interviews with staff and headteachers, during the interim and the final evaluation process, Fiona was consistently referred to in highly positive terms for providing the opportunity to participate. Her energy, commitment and hands-on support was seen as key element of the success of the whole venture. Given that the evaluation was to be as objective as possible, the decision was taken not to interview Fiona but to gather the views of those who had participated in the project.

### **Jess Carroll**

Jess Carroll is a development officer who worked with Fiona to support teachers, two days per week, over the initial twenty months of the project. The interview took place in May 2007 towards the end of the initial two-year phase of the project. She was asked to consider the fundamental differences she perceived the project to have made to participating teachers' practice; the success of the CPD in which project teachers had engaged; anything in the CPD element of the project which, with hindsight, might have been done differently; what she considered to be the next steps in the project's development.

Her observations are made mainly in the light of her support visits to schools but also take account of CPD input and the 'Recall Days' during which the project teachers came together to share experiences and disseminate developing practice.

*Perceived differences in practice:*

It is apparent that all of the teachers on the project have improved their practice. However, it is also fair to say that while some have made very significant and, almost certainly, lasting changes to their practice, others – starting from a similar baseline – have not carried the changes they have made as far.

Teachers on the project have commented, overwhelmingly, on the increase in confidence of their pupils: Jess has noted an accompanying increase in the confidence of many teachers. This confidence seems to manifest itself most noticeably in teachers' willingness to dominate less in class and to allow pupils to take responsibility for their own learning: they are 'letting go' much more than they would, traditionally, have been comfortable doing.

Another indicator of the apparent increase in teachers' confidence can be seen in their willingness to admit to needing 'thinking time' *themselves*. In the course of a discussion, many teachers are now quite at ease with saying to a class, 'Give me a minute to think about that.'



Teachers seem to have become better listeners. It is reasonable to assume that this relates to the CPD they have received on questioning and on Bloom's taxonomy: they are listening better in order to ask better questions. 'Good teachers ask good questions.'

There is more emphasis on the legitimacy of talk in its own right – rather than as a precursor to, say, writing. Pupils understand that talking and listening are *for learning*. They are being challenged to think / consider / weigh up options / justify / challenge / question. Jess believes that in nurturing these skills teachers are giving their pupils something which is sustainable and which will contribute to their ability to negotiate the world successfully.

Jess is a specialist in the area of dyslexia and is hugely enthusiastic about the benefits that TLL has brought to pupils with dyslexic type disabilities. In terms of inclusion, she has seen pupils improve academically and in self-esteem. She reports one pupil as having said to her, *For the first time in my life, I don't feel stupid*. Teachers appear to be much more open to reflecting upon, discussing and analysing their own work.

Pupils are being encouraged to listen more closely to each other. Previously, and at the beginning of the project, it was quite common for pupils simply to parrot each other's answers, now there is clear evidence that they are listening, thinking and building on what has been said previously.

The project emphasises the importance of valuing other people and what they have to say. Jess believes that the standard of pupil behaviour has improved in the classes she has visited, with the peer pressure within the group helping maintain this good behaviour. Even pupils with behavioural difficulties caused by ADHD / Asperger's syndrome etc. can be seen to be more settled in class.

Jess witnessed a joint session between pupils from Glenburn school and their peers from Sacred Heart primary. In terms of inclusion, she believes it was a remarkable success with the Glenburn pupils taking a significant part in the discussion and the Sacred Heart pupils clearly valuing and encouraging their participation.

#### *CPD*

The initial links established by Fiona with Yorkshire schools, combined with the keynote CPD sessions from Cathy Fiddes, provided a good overview of what the project was about and of what it might achieve. First rate CPD input such as that from Robert Fisher of Brunel University – a national figure in the field of child development and thinking skills – gave teachers a sense of being valued and treated as leading edge professionals. Similarly, the involvement of evaluators from Strathclyde University lent the project, in the perception of the teachers involved, both weight and credibility.

The rolling programme which involved teachers developing TLL strategies with their classes, being visited by Fiona and Jess in a 'critical friend' capacity, coming to recall days to share experiences / ideas and to learn from each, established a practical Kolb



cycle to support the development of their skills. Teachers, to varying extents, have developed greater skills in the use of interactive white boards, ICT and the digital video camera.

The stress on pupil-pupil interaction has helped teachers in the development of AifL strategies and will certainly help reassure teachers that they are contributing to nurturing *ACE* capacities.

### *What might have been done differently?*

Jess felt that it would have been desirable – certainly in year 2 – for teachers to have had greater opportunities to visit each other's classes. This was possible in schools where more than one teacher was involved in the project, however, in schools where there was only one teacher involved, Jess perceived some sense of isolation and felt that the support of another colleague would have been beneficial.

The initial intention of the project was that all participating schools would have at least two teachers involved. For a variety of reasons this didn't transpire in some schools. A strong recommendation to schools beginning the project next session would be that there should be more than one teacher involved and that timetabling provision should be made to allow teachers to support each other in a 'critical friend' role.

### *Next steps*

Jess saw the following as being the logical 'next steps' in the project.

- The teachers who are now established in the project should be used to help disseminate this good practice across the authority (and across Stirlingshire).
- By the end of session 2007 – 08, TLL strategies will have begun to become established in all of Inverclyde's primary schools. An obvious next step has to be to initiate these strategies within the authority's pre-5 provision and – almost certainly more pressing - address the issue of what happens when these confident, increasingly articulate pupils move 'up' into secondary. This is a concern which pupils themselves are voicing, *What happens if they don't do TLL in secondary?*

The authority plans to extend Jess's secondment to the project in session 2007 – 08, when she will be involved four days per week. Her remit will give her a major role in supporting next session's rolling out of the project across all of Inverclyde's primary schools.

### **Dr Nigel Lawrie**

Shortly after moving from the post of Headteacher of Port Glasgow High School to become Head of Service, Nigel was approached by Fiona about her visit to York to see the work going on there based on Professor Robin Alexander's *Dialogic Teaching*. It was seen as an approach which would both raise attainment and promote the



development of thinking in young people; two aspirations which were prominent in Inverclyde Council too.

Nigel saw the possibilities in the paper which Fiona wrote for him and took the proposal to the other Heads of Service. He was convinced of the merit of the approach and although the funding required to implement the project represented a substantial proportion of his budget, he argued the case sufficiently persuasively with his colleagues for the paper to gain approval. Nigel feels that he was able to 'sell' the approach because it was not only consistent with the Authority's aspirations, but also because he saw it as a flagship development, something no other Scottish authority was doing, the success of which would show that small local authorities were as capable as others of being creative and strategic.

Once the funding was secured, Fiona took over. She directed the project in every sense. Even during her secondment to HMIE, she insisted in spending at least one day per month back in the authority to support the project. Nigel, because of his other commitments, took a hands-off approach. However, he did make a point of attending the launch CPD event and was involved in the conference at which the interim evaluation report was presented to the participants.

Nigel has since moved on to work with HMIE but before he left the authority he worked hard to secure funding for Talking, Listening and Learning in Inverclyde for a further two years. In the meantime, however, Ian Fraser was appointed as Director and Fiona lost no time in meeting him to put the case for the continuance and

expansion of TLL. Once again, she made a sufficiently convincing case to persuade Ian to keep Jess on in her seconded post to support the project.

Nigel's view of where Talking, Listening and Learning might go in Inverclyde include:

*Making the transition to secondary school.* Already, some preparatory work has gone on with St Columba's High School but he would like to see the excellent progress made by P6 and P7 children consolidated and built on in S1 and beyond. He is under no illusion about the scope of this task but is convinced that TLL offers a real opportunity for *progression, continuity and coherence* to be addressed in the context of primary-secondary transition.

*Extending the approach to all primary schools.* Already there has been a commitment by all primaries to have TLL in their development plans.

*Ensuring the provision of high quality CPD.* The teachers in the project, unanimously, cited the provision of CPD as a necessary element in the dissemination of TLL. They were sceptical of the 'cascade' approach of old, though they were all willing to work with colleagues to show how TLL can make a difference to pupils' learning. As part of the CPD provision, Fiona and others are producing a pack of materials including DVD footage of practice captured by teachers in the project so far.

*Extending the approach to Early Years.* The inclusion of P1 and P2 classes in the project to date was not part of the initial plan but it has been one of the success stories

of the project. In at least one other school, the success of TLL with older pupils prompted a request by nursery staff to get training (some of which was delivered by the pupils) so that they could introduce the approach with pre-school children.

*Sharing practice with other Councils.* The move of one teacher who was part of the project to a school in Stirling where she continued to use the approach, has prompted the Council to introduce TLL in a number of schools and Inverclyde staff will be involved in the launch in August. In a spirit of cooperation, Inverclyde has extended invitations to other authorities to visit schools involved in TLL.

*Don't rush the expansion of TLL; hasten slowly.* Nigel is convinced that Talking, Listening and Learning has a positive contribution to make to the successful implementation of *A Curriculum for Excellence* and Assessment is for Learning. It also has echoes of Teaching for Understanding, an approach pioneered by David Perkins in Harvard in which some Inverclyde teachers have been trained. Nigel believes that schools should be given time to make the connections among these approaches and that local CPD, at cluster level, might be a good model. Having local 'recall days' for people involved in the project would provide support and allow good practice to grow organically.

## **Dissemination**



### *Other Authorities*

While all the teachers involved have provided some CPD for colleagues in their schools, others have been involved in providing CPD on a national basis.

Participating teachers have presented, at a national Literacy conference, at an HMIE 'Good Practice' conference, at a Learning and Teaching Scotland 'Good Practice' conference and at a SCYSSA event in Edinburgh. Additionally, one teacher who moved to a Stirlingshire school, delivered CPD to colleagues in her new authority. The success of this sharing of good practice prompted Stirling Council to commission Inverclyde to provide CPD which will initiate a TLL project in all Stirlingshire primary schools. Again, it is likely that some of this CPD will be carried out by Inverclyde teachers.

Agnes McKenzie, a QIO from Western Isles, visited some of the schools in the TLL project. Her conclusion, after observing P1 pupils 'adhering to their talking, listening and learning rules' and a P6 class in which the teacher 'was able to almost stand back and let the group drive itself' was that 'this is an excellent project with lots of mileage in the future.'

Similarly, Highland Council staff have been in touch to find out about the project as part of their drive to improve learning and teaching and to complement the excellent work being done in that authority on Assessment is for Learning and thinking skills.

### *Other sectors*

i) Early Years

Already, within the project itself there have been links made with early years and some schools with nurseries have begun sharing the pedagogy with colleagues. This and the remarkable success of the project with P1 and P2 classes has convinced staff that the earlier this approach is introduced, the better able pupils will be to become successful learners.

ii) Secondary

A tentative beginning has been made with St Columba's High School in introducing Talking, Listening and Learning approaches to the secondary school. *A Curriculum for Excellence* offers an ideal opportunity for this kind of dialogue to take place.

What is absolutely clear from the evaluation is that the young people who have been involved in TLL in P7 have developed skills and dispositions of such sophistication that not to build on them in S1 would be a travesty. Indeed, it may be that the TLL approach offers an important perspective on both *progression* and *coherence*, P7 to S1. The pedagogy involved would be an excellent basis for cross-sectoral CPD with a view to delivering the seamless curriculum, 3-18, implicit in *A Curriculum for Excellence*.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The context for the Talking, Listening and Learning in Inverclyde project was two-fold; to improve children's thinking and to contribute to the achievement of the four purposes of *A Curriculum for Excellence* – successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Robin Alexander (2004) claims that '*dialogic teaching harnesses the power of talk to stimulate and develop pupils' thinking and advance their learning and understanding.*' (p.5) The evidence from this project, albeit small-scale and of a relatively short duration, would tend to support his claim.

We have drawn some tentative conclusions from the evidence presented in this report and have made some recommendations based on the views of the participants and on our understanding of the change process.

### *Conclusions*

1. Almost all of the Headteachers commented on *links* between Talking, Listening and Learning and *A Curriculum for Excellence* and Assessment is for Learning. It was generally agreed that Talking, Listening and Learning goes a long way towards producing:

- *successful learners*: While no attempt was made in this evaluation to measure improvements in attainment, many of the teachers were adamant that such improvements had, in fact, been made. What is certainly true from the evaluation is that pupils' understanding of the learning process and the role of



thinking in learning was remarkable. They were able to give a clear rationale for cooperative learning.

- *confident individuals*: confidence was one of the most commonly used words among teachers when discussing the impact of Talking, Listening and Learning on the pupils. The researchers observed many instances of a level of confidence which would have been commendable in much older pupils, especially in areas such as small-group discussion and solo talk. In some schools, this confidence extended to pupils taking responsibility for organising assemblies and giving votes of thanks to visiting speakers.
- *effective contributors*: In general, the most significant gain had been in the way in which pupils, from P1 to P7, could sustain high quality discussion on complex ideas for lengthy periods of time. These pupils, through their understanding of the rationale and rules for cooperative learning, were able to make contributions to group tasks, sharing ideas, building on points made by others, listening actively and being thoughtful in their responses to others' ideas.
- *responsible citizens*: If responsible citizenship is about respect, tolerance, valuing others, shared decision-making, rights and responsibilities, then Talking, Listening and Learning offers a vehicle, a pedagogy, to develop such attributes.

It also enhances both the dialogue and the peer-and self-assessment elements of Assessment is for Learning.

2. *Teacher confidence* improved during the lifetime of the project. Initially, some teachers expressed a concern about shifting the balance in favour of giving pupils more responsibility for their learning. Now, the concern has disappeared and there were many instances, observed in lessons and captured on DVD, of pupils taking responsibility for their learning, including the P1 classes. In one sequence in one of the DVDs, the teacher is sitting with the pupils in a horseshoe shape and Jess is sitting in the background observing. During the discussion the teacher gets up and leaves the room for a few minutes, during which time the discussion continues without faltering!

3. The *balance between talking and writing* shifted during the project. Initially, teachers were wary of the time which might be taken up by an increased emphasis on pupil dialogue, to the detriment of writing. They felt that writing was more important because it provided tangible 'evidence' of pupils' work, which could be used with parents or HMIE. Now, there is an assurance that pupils' understanding, skills and confidence in discussion are as important as a 'full tray' of written work.

4. The *link between talking and both reading and writing* was strengthened. While no quantitative evidence has been gathered on pupil attainment, many of the teachers feel, and the researchers certainly observed, that the quality of the pupil dialogue led to more insightful reading of texts and more thoughtful writing. A pupil, referred to in the Interim Report, summed this up by explaining that while she liked

writing things neatly in her jotter, she felt she learned better when talking in her trio. The adage that the 'reading muscle' is best exercised when having your ideas about a text challenged, when you have to defend your opinions by reference to the evidence of the text, by listening to others' views, seems to be borne out here.

5. Many staff involved commented on the *inclusiveness* of the pedagogy associated with Talking, Listening and Learning. Those pupils who might have been designated 'more able' learners, were not always the most insightful in group discussions. The fact that inter-personal and intra-personal intelligences were emphasised as well as linguistic, seemed to offer *all* pupils an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities as thinkers. Indeed, there is evidence that pupils with specific learning difficulties and additional support needs, flourished by using this approach.
6. *Dialogue* became more sophisticated during the project. The introductory CPD had spent sometime looking at Bloom's Taxonomy, and teachers used this knowledge to widen the range of questions in their lessons. The dialogue was 'deepened' in a real sense with probing for justification being part of the discussion process.
7. A vexed issue has always been *how to tell a pupil s/he is wrong* without being judgemental or negative. For some time, there was a school of thought which proposed that teachers should never tell a child s/he was wrong. Now, within the framework of Talking, Listening and Learning, the issue of right and wrong can be



addressed, positively and supportively by encouraging pupils to explain the thinking behind their answers or contributions.

8. *Expectations of pupils* were raised by this approach. The Piagetian notion that very young children cannot grasp abstract concepts has, of course, been challenged over the years by thinkers such as Vygotsky (social constructivism) Matthew Lipman (Philosophy for Children). In the classrooms observed, P1 pupils were engaging in discussions about moral dilemmas, P4 pupils debating the concept of beauty and P7s grappling with issues around honesty.

9. Increasingly, teachers were applying the pedagogy of Talking, Listening and Learning across the whole curriculum. This was not something else for the pupils to learn or for the teachers to do. This was *metacognition* in action; it was about *how* the pupils learn.

10. Pupils' motivation and behaviour are improved by Talking, Listening and Learning.

11. Talking, Listening and Learning is a *pedagogy for all*. All pupils, irrespective of any label attached to them as a result of tests, can excel as thinkers, as collaborative learners and as responsible decision-makers by using this approach.

## *Recommendations*

1. If a school decides to introduce Talking, Listening and Learning, it would be most effective if it were used throughout the school, from P1 to P7.
2. Expecting the teachers already involved simply to 'cascade' the pedagogy would be unfair on them and would be unlikely to be sufficient to ensure that the approach becomes embedded in the whole school's practice.
3. The CPD which launched Talking, Listening and Learning in Inverclyde was of a high quality, as was the ongoing in-service throughout the project. If new schools are to come on board, the same quality of CPD will be necessary.
4. Classroom observation has proved to be an effective mechanism for allowing new staff to experience the pedagogy associated with Talking, Listening and Learning. Opportunities should be made available wherever possible.
5. Teachers working in pairs within the same school is a powerful way of ensuring that the initiative is sustainable over time.

6. If the good practice already establishing itself in primary schools is to be built on, then provision should be made for continuity and progression into the Authority's secondary schools.



## References and Further Reading

- Alexander, R. (2004) *Towards Dialogic Teaching*
- Black, P. and William, D. (1999) *Inside the Black Box* London King's College
- Blythe, T. and Associates (1994) *The Teaching for Understanding Guide* SA Jossey-Bass
- Boyd, B. (2005) *Primary-Secondary Transition* Paisley Hodder Gibson
- Scottish Executive Education Department (2004) *A Curriculum for Excellence*
- Boyd, B. and Dunlop, A-W. (2007) *Curriculum Architecture: A Literature Review*  
Glasgow Learning and Teaching Scotland  
<http://www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/about/research.asp>
- Feuerstein, R., Feuerstein, R.F., Falik, L.H. and Rand, Y. (2002)
- Fisher, R. (1990) *Teaching Children to Think* Cheltenham Nelson Thornes
- Kozoulin, A. (1994) *The Cognitive Revolution in Learning in Creating Powerful Thinking in Teachers and Students: Diverse Perspectives* Mangieri, J.N. and Block, C.C. (Eds) Harcourt BrA *Curriculum for Excellence* Publishers

Lipman, M. (2003) *Thinking in Education* Cambridge University Press

Mobilia, W and Gordon, R. (1997) *Critical Skills Programme* New England  
Antioch University

Mosley, J. (1993) *Turn Your School Around* Cambs LDA

Perkins (1992) *Smart Schools: Better thinking and Learning for Every Child* NY  
The Free Press

Ward, C. and Craigen, J. (1999) *Cooperative Learning: A Resource Booklet* Ontario  
Durham District School Board