The Relationship Between Dialogue and Written Scaffolding: an investigation into the effects of written scaffolding and dialogic repertoires on a Year 9 English Literature Class

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Abstract:

This research explores how the responses to literature writing of a class of Year 9 students is affected by the use of written scaffolds typically employed in English secondary classrooms and how dialogic examination of the scaffolds affects writing performance. Particularly pertinent are the effects of taking time away from writing in the lesson and giving it to dialogic teaching.

Through a mixture of quantitative and ethnographic research methods, ideological underpinnings for classroom and school practices are explored. Tensions between progressive and neo-traditional approaches to ideas of talk in the classroom provide a backdrop for examination of students' attitudes towards talk and its relationship to written outcomes.

The findings reveal that dialogic techniques combined with written scaffolding produce more and better-quality writing even if the amount of time given to do that writing is reduced. Students, however, do not necessarily appreciate the impact of the dialogic practices on their written outcomes.

Contents

Introduction

Following on from my Part 1 Research into students' attitudes towards classroom dialogue this investigation attempts to explore the efficacy of dialogic teaching interventions on students' written outcomes. Literacy and Oracy, together, is one of the 'Magnificent 7' strategies that the school I was working in at the time of the research promotes as vital in driving student progress. However, the relationship between the two is not elaborated on and raises questions as to how much time each of the two components oracy and literacy be given in a teaching sequence. Furthermore, at the onset of my career it was a widely held belief, as generalised by Cooke (2000, p. 1), that too much teacher talking time was symptomatic of poor-quality teaching and that, as of the turn of the century "it [was] preferable to reduce teacher talk (TT) so that learners may talk more." However, there is in my opinion a political dimension to such assertions and that by the time of this investigation official attitudes have changed, although this may not necessarily be reflected in the embodied practices of long-service teachers.

As a teacher that held a Teaching and Learning Responsibility, TLR, - an additional payment in exchange for work on successfully implementing interventions to help particularly GCSE results - coupled with my career history of being held accountable for individual class and student results it was difficult for me to not choose an area of intervention that I felt confident would deliver tangible, quantifiable results. In particular, those students perceived at risk of falling behind, those categorised as SEND, eligible for the Pupil Premium or self-identified as EAL and their success relative to more advantaged peers have been spotlighted as indicators of successful school practice.

However, recent commentary (Cushing 2021, 2022, 2023) on oracy has highlighted the potentially oppressive nature of deficit models and put forward a direct challenge to the popularised pedagogical advice of Quigley (2018, 2020, 2022) and Lemov (2021). This is reflective of a wider rift in current educational thinking amongst UK teachers which seems to have become polarised between progressive and traditional camps, with the progressive trend being heavily influenced by the widely cited Freire and his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1972) whilst a neo-traditional trend seems to centre around high profile current individual writers and practitioners such as Birbalsingh (2020), Bennett (2020) and Lemov (2021) as mentioned earlier. Indeed, some schools insist (Cushing 2021) on teachers using Lemov's techniques, and whilst those of Quigley (2018, 2020, 2022) have proved popular, they have come under attack as methodologies of structural racism (Cushing 2023).

Additionally, whilst it was clear to me that some interventions had produced tangible results in our school setting, what was not clear was to what extent students necessarily understood the rationale for interventions or were wholly content with their involvement in them. Perhaps, like Smyth, Shacklock and Hattam (1999) suggest, these interventions were being "done to" students rather than done for or in alignment with them.

Therefore, alongside the quantitative data I decided to make the practitioner research mixed methods so that students would have other mechanisms wherein they could emphasis their narratives (Bruner 2004, Bakhtin 1981) in relation to the intervention. These mechanisms bring to the fore though issues of student voice and how these intersect in students' minds with classroom-based research and dialogic teaching methods. Historically students have been led to believe that student voice (Skerrit 2022) is a way in which they can assert power

in a school setting, and with methodologies such as questionnaires being similar in both some practitioner research and student voice exercises it is possible that students may conflate the two. Moreover, issues of power differentials in the classroom (Foucault 1986; Freire 1972) may well affect the way in which students respond to these methodologies whether consciously attempting to influence practice or by shifting their self-narrative viewpoint, pivoting towards what they believe either the teacher or their peers would wish them to be like.

It is these discourses (Gee 2015) that fascinate as a researcher rather than the more prosaic neo-liberal quest for increases in efficiencies of writing.

However, whilst a sizeable body of work has looked at dialogic repertoires (Alexander 2008, 2018, 2020, Mercer 1995, 2000, Howe & Abedin 2013), it has often been to figure out which dialogic patterns exist in the classroom, and not necessarily how effective they have been – although there exists a corpus of research on this centred on maths in primary schools. This has led Howe and Abedin (2013 p. 325) to state that,

“much more is known about how classroom dialogue is organized than about whether certain modes of organization are more beneficial than others” and “arguably the characterization of dialogic patterns should not be accorded high priority when it comes to future research”.

Going on to recommend (Howe & Abedin 2013, p. 346):

“perhaps quantitative methods should now be employed to examine whether some modes of dialogic organization are more beneficial than others, in the knowledge that: (1) there is little

alternative; (2) until the research is complete, it will be unclear whether quantification is a useful proxy or whether the simplification it entails is crippling"

What constitutes "beneficial" needs to be examined within a critical discourse, is it beneficial in the long or short term, or perhaps in a precise moment, is it beneficial to those already in positions of power or is it beneficial in an emancipatory way? The evaluation of what constitutes being beneficial to some extent becomes a value-driven, even political discourse. Will the "simplification" of quantifying the effects of dialogic repertoires lead to lethal mutations in teaching practices that ultimately are not "beneficial"?

It is my belief that the policing of teacher talking time through surveillance, inspection and policy at a macro and meso level is in itself a politically motivated act and the conception of a teacher's role in the classroom is embodied in practices that shift depending on the government of the time and the political values of the teaching organisation in which they practice. Enhancing notions of professionalism in teaching (Müller & Cook, 2024) may serve to shield the profession from these swings, although they may on the contrary, in fact serve to fossilize certain politicised mindsets.

The ubiquity of written scaffolding in the secondary English classroom has attracted commentary on its effectiveness (Gibbons 2017, 2019), but rarely generates the political critiques of other language-based interventions and seems indeed to be an accepted part of the culture of the secondary English classroom.

My previous investigations into talk-to-text and dialogic repertoires led me to question the relationship between these written scaffolds and spoken language in the classroom.

Literature Review

The status of classroom dialogue has been subject to legislative and institutional control through DfE guidance, exam specification and Ofsted inspection. This in turn has led to school-based policies and procedures aimed at aligning classroom practice to the shifting demands of these. Post 2010 educational reforms instituted in the main by Michael Gove and influenced by the conservative educational philosophy of E. D. Hirsch (1996) whilst seeking to solidify a knowledge-rich curriculum in English, concurrently politicised it, whilst also removing the weighting of speaking and listening from the high-accountability GCSE English Language examinations. It is possible to read into this a diminution in the importance of the spoken language in the eyes of government policy.

The 2021 Oracy All Party Parliamentary Group report 'Speak for Change' outlines the history of 'oracy' in the curriculum in England, from the coining of the term in 1965 by Andrew Wilkinson. It also outlines clearly the benefits of and need to "raise the status and priority of oracy in education". These reasons include academic outcomes, life chances, well-being and social mobility. Voice 21, an oracy advocacy group and charity, giving evidence in the report (page 14) supports a greater prioritisation of oracy across all subjects stating bluntly that "it works". An All Party Parliamentary Group does not, however, make policy decisions, and in practice, particularly in secondary English, oracy, including 'speaking and listening' as a desirable educational objective, has been de-prioritised and its status lowered since 2010.

However, alongside this trend has been a move towards evidence-informed teaching practice, with sound research bases, which, if done credibly, should reveal whether these systemic reforms are in fact 'what works' best. Ideologically, this would be demonstrated in

measurable, quantifiable, progress made by students. Can the use of classroom dialogue demonstrably, quantifiably, drive student progress?

Classroom dialogue has been put forward as not only an effective means of enabling students to learn, but also a democratising or emancipatory act in itself (Barros 2020). Are students themselves aware of and willing participants in the types of classroom dialogue that are purported to help them achieve this progress?

Written scaffolding has become ubiquitous in secondary English classrooms in the UK (Gibbons 2017, 2019) whilst seemingly inspiring little love from the teachers in those classrooms. Whilst mooted as useful tools to enable students to achieve, are they effective on their own?

If both classroom dialogue and written scaffolding are effective drivers of student progress, what is the effect of combining them both?

‘What Works’, RCTs and the ‘Gold Standard’

There has also been a movement, perhaps in the UK most notably promoted, guided and legitimized by the work of the Education Endowment Foundation towards more research-informed practice in the education sector. The EEF was founded to leverage social mobility and equity through education, and has a particular focus on ameliorating outcomes for students who may be disadvantaged in education, notably those in receipt of the Pupil Premium - PP, those categorised as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities –

SEND, and those for whom English is an Additional Language – EAL. This movement, often characterized, not always positively (Cushing 2023) as a 'what works' agenda relies heavily on Randomised Control Trials, RCTs, which as a research technique borrowed from medical trials are purported to give greater legitimacy than other forms of social science enquiry. Indeed, the government seal of approval for this approach can be seen in the Department for Education commissioning of a medical researcher and science writer, Ben Goldacre, to produce a report entitled 'Building Evidence into Education' (2013). These paradigms in educational research tend to favour and legitimize quantitative methods over qualitative ones and can be seen as supporting a neo-liberal status quo with emphasis on measurable educational outcomes – results – but arguably delegitimizes ethnographic or participant centred approaches. Returning to the RCTs, the 'Background' (Goldacre 2013, p. 3) section links thematically "randomised trials, and evidence based practice" with the seeming implication that randomised trials were the basis or "gold standard" (Elliot 2023, p. 65) – which is challenged by Alexander (2020) - of evidence based practice. Later Goldacre (2013, p. 15) goes on to laud a "community that … doesn't misunderstand evidence based practice, or reject randomised trials out of hand," further conflating the two concepts. However, it is considered difficult to run a true RCT as a teacher-practitioner (Elliott 2023) working full-time in a school. Whilst 'what works' has been framed as a lever of social mobility, this discourse has been challenged as authoritarian and Eurocentric in its approach.

Criticisms of 'What Works' and 'Deficit Discourses'

'What Works' has been framed by some commentators, most notably in the UK Cushing (2021, 2022, 2023) as part of a systemic racialised ideology that promotes the habitus (Bourdieu in DiMaggio, 1979) of the ruling white majority and is "built on the logics of white supremacy" (Cushing 2023, p. 258). This "cognitive imperialism" is instituted and legitimised by the prioritising of certain types of research such as RCTs and is centred on state-sanctioned and funded institutions such as the Education Endowment Foundation. An ideological lineage for this viewpoint can be drawn to Freire and his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1972). Although, it is perhaps important to note that originally Freire was, in his work dealing with initially illiterate adults who wished to learn to read, whom Freire positioned as "*educandos*" (Barros, 2020, p. 160) full of agency, and not child-students in compulsory education. Cushing (2021) is critical not only of linguistic policies, but also of the wider policies, practices and pedagogical perspectives embodied in a neo-traditional education movement in the UK (Bennett 2020, Birbalsingh 2020, Lemov 2021, Quigley 2018, 2020, 2022) explicitly referencing Foucauldian (1979) ideas of the surveillance and policing of the body in his seminal work 'Discipline and Punish.' Interestingly, whilst Cushing writes at length about the types of language in classrooms he visited and how they are policed, he does not distinguish between Foucault's largely sight-based panopticon and the policing of the soundscape Gallagher (2010) explores in schools.

Foucault and Discipline – Panopticon and Soundscapes

The silent corridors of Michaela Community School (Birbalsingh 2020) in critics' eyes are a form of policing of the soundscape and feed into Cushing's criticisms of the policing of the body embodied by techniques such as SLANT from Lemov's 'Teach Like a Champion'

(2021), and the "micro-management of classroom discourse" (Cushing 2021, p. 26). SLANT [Sit up straight, Listen carefully, Ask and answer questions, Never interrupt, Track the speaker] (The Meadowfields Academy [pseudonymised] Playbook, 'Play 3', p.13) in particular is a technique that actively centres students responding physically to teacher commands. The 'Playbook' of an academy that has adopted Lemov's techniques enthusiastically states that it should be called for in "a strong voice" and to "Expect 100% compliance". Moreover, in reference to Foucauldian ideas of surveillance, it also instructs the teacher to "Be Seen Looking", as well as to "Correct and reinforce" – meeker terms than discipline and punish, but critics might draw linguistic comparisons. This neo-traditional worldview, supposedly imposed by political figures of the right such as Michael Gove, seems opposed to the Freireian notion of an emancipatory "*pedagogia liberadora*" (Barros, 2020, p. 160) which can trace its ideological history through Latin American Liberation Theology and Marxism. The how of teaching becomes a political battleground with the ideas of 'What Works' being positioned here as authoritarian and neo-colonialist.

Michaela Community School is famed, or for some, notorious for, its silent corridors (Birbalsingh, 2020, p. 309) which a staff member at the school describes positively as "lovely, silent corridors" alongside referencing the strength of feeling in the education community about the idea and its ability to "shock people, offend them even!". Katharine Birbalsingh, dubbed 'Britain' Strictest Headteacher' (Evening Standard 2024) the Headteacher of the school has been decidedly political since her 2010 speech at the Conservative Party Conference. Detractors point to ideological bias and supporters laud her school's well above-average results at GCSE and A-Level. This emphasis on academic progress is a hallmark of a usually right-wing, conservative educational ethos prioritising achievement as a marker of and mechanism for, social mobility. Such surveillance and

policing of the soundscape, for Birbalsingh and imitators, create a “culture” (Birbalsingh 2020) wherein such success at high stakes formal assessment is possible.

However, for some the silencing of children is seen as a repressive act, and, in the context of schools, like Michaela, with high numbers of children from global majority backgrounds, even one of neo-colonialism. Within the classroom how then is talk itself to be viewed? Certainly, from a position of empowering students, Cushing (2023) attacks the policing of the language of marginalised students in the UK, as a racio-linguistic act of violence. In the background is the assumption that authentic Englishes and student habituses should be celebrated, but cumulatively it feels like Cushing’s (2021, 2022, 2023) articles are actively against practices and only by implication in favour of alternative practices. There is mooted to be a need for a re-formed society that eliminates structural inequalities, which whilst Marxist and revolutionary in its conception, leaves teachers without much sense of agency.

Voices for the development of standard English in these students believe that education is one of the few relatively strong levers of social mobility available. Neo-traditional teaching advocates would suggest that discipline is a moral imperative, especially for the less advantaged students, in order for those students to be able to achieve academically as a means of escaping poverty. Escaping poverty and eliminating poverty are, of course, two very different things. One of the EEF’s Pupil Premium experts, Marc Rowland (2015), speaks of doing what is “within our gift”, but also very clearly sides with those voices expressing a deficit discourse view of students’ linguistic abilities; in a personal communication he told me that: “the language gap IS the achievement gap”.

Dialogic Repertoires

Dialogic teaching repertoires (Alexander 2020) have been investigated in long standing research by a group of researchers who ultimately founded the Cambridge Oracy Project. The research is comprehensive and builds on a core of researchers working over time (Alexander 2004, 2008, 2018, 2020; Howe, Hennessy, Mercer, Vrikki, & Wheatley, 2019; Mercer 1995, 2000) which both investigates and propagates the notion of high quality talk being a means of making learning more effective. However, it has also been noted that a great deal of this research (Howe & Abedin 2013) has been into the mechanics of what happens in a classroom, with focus on verbal exchanges or turns and patterns such as IRE/IRF, as opposed to a more quantitative look at how dialogic practices affect educational outcomes.

Initially, a great deal of the research was and continues to be at Primary School level, for example Nichol and Andrews' (2018) which "analyses the whole school philosophy necessary for Oracy-Dialogics to be successful". At Secondary Level the EEF's guidance report on 'Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools (Quigley & Coleman 2019) identified 7 recommendations: "Recommendation 1 Prioritise 'disciplinary literacy' across the curriculum; Recommendation 2 Provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject; Recommendation 3 Develop students' ability to read complex academic texts; Recommendation 4 Break down complex writing tasks; Recommendation 5 Combine writing instruction with reading in every subject; *Recommendation 6 Provide opportunities for structured talk;* Recommendation 7 Provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students" [My Italics] The recommendation acknowledges the role of dialogue in the classroom, however the study it cites for its efficacy is Myhill and Jones' 2009 early primary

based study ‘How Talk Becomes Text: Investigating the Concept of Oral Rehearsal in Early Years Classrooms’: which as stated deals with young children and not secondary.

Accountable Talk as outlined in Resnick, Asterhan and Clarke (2018) and American academic Lauren Resnick herself are explicitly mentioned, however none of the work of or academics involved in the Cambridge Oracy Project are. It seems an odd omission when their work is based in British classrooms. Also, one of Alexander’s research projects ‘Developing dialogic teaching: genesis, process, trial’ (2018) was funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, and subject to their preferred RCT methodology. In it however, Alexander (2018, p. 1) states “The RCT methodology affords limited explanatory purchase but insights are available from other studies.” It also seems odd that this very recent study, looking at upper primary aged children in Year 5 was not referenced in favour of a study nearly a decade older looking at younger children. When on a EEF Research School course and the subject of research methods came up, I said to the course director that Alexander did not necessarily see RCTs as the “gold standard” and the director of the course shut me down very rapidly in what seemed to be a rare flash of anger. It is conceivable that the EEF are actively gatekeeping the type of research that they feel is relevant. However, it is clear that it is possible to conduct RCTs and quantitative research on dialogic repertoires, however, it is also clear that other research methods are seen as desirable by leading researchers in the field.

In 2010, as New Labour gave way to a Conservative/Liberal coalition in the UK Robin Alexander (2010, p. 103) wrote about the politicisation of literacy research comparing his Cambridge Primary Review and Lauren Resnick’s “accountable talk”. Not only is there a call to “connect the language of learning with the language of democratic participation” ,

something which resonates with a Freireian view of the purpose of education, but also the acknowledgment that what goes on in the classroom must “relate to the values of the culture and political system in which they are located." This macrosystem, to borrow Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) term, in the context of the UK education system, is subject to shifts in policy and practices as governments change. Alexander (2010) felt the need to update his article from the 2009 original speech with specific reference to how the Cambridge Primary Review was received by the government and that the government then changed, changing the political landscape of education and warning of how changes in politics affect changes in educational policies that are not necessarily grounded in research. As this is being written, a Labour government have come into power after 14 years and in its election manifesto (Labour Party, 2024) whilst promising unspecified “evidence-based early-language interventions in primary schools” but also more widely, and more vaguely, “essential digital, speaking and creative skills”. In a “Mission Statement” speech (2024) newly appointed Prime Minister Kier Starmer described the importance of “Oracy” as “a skill for learning [and] also a skill for life”. Promising to “weave oracy through a new national curriculum” it is nevertheless unclear whether oracy, as posited here, is a skill, a form of knowledge, or the route to the transmission of or co-creation of learning. The emphasis appears to be on skill, and the skills versus knowledge debate in education tends to put those favouring the teaching of skills as progressive teachers rather than traditional. However, Alexander (2010, p. 107) is clear that “domain knowledge is essential to effective teaching” and rails against the reduction of dialogic repertoires to skills.

Interestingly, Starmer directly addresses this perceived dichotomy in educational thought later in the speech:

“But this debate about the relative importance of knowledge and skills, people outside the education world are baffled by it – and they’re right. Everyone with their feet on the ground in the real world knows you need both, and these old arguments, old practices, old divides – they’re holding our children back.” (Starmer, 2024)

Whilst in neither the speech, nor the manifesto is the idea of “knowledge-rich” curriculum knocked, what is added as new, or changing, is the idea of these three “essential … skills”.

Are dialogic teaching repertoires drills to increase skills? In conception, no. Holistically, they should align with the five principles as outlined by Alexander (2008): collectivity, reciprocity, support, cumulation, and purposefulness, and get students to think about the subject matter in the classroom, with at least some students articulating their thoughts out loud, and all students given the opportunity to listen to this constructed thought. It is important to note that these principles are “aspirations” (Alexander 2010, p. 106) and what actually goes on in the classroom is likely to be messier. However, it is clear that dialogic teaching is a pedagogical mechanism that involves reciprocity between teacher and learner, and amongst the learners themselves. There are shades of Freire’s “*dodiscência*” the teach-learn dualism that equalises the roles of student and teacher, or student-teacher and teacher-learner as Freire would have it, with the former being “*educandos*” (Barros, 2020, p. 160), grammatically they are not passive recipients of learning, grammatically they are the subject of their education.

Is then dialogic teaching a way of shifting the balance away from the teacher and onto the learner, student-focused or student-led, learning? Not necessarily, in fact Alexander (2020) describes dialogic exchanges that are more frequent in France and Russia than the UK,

wherein the dialogue is almost exclusively between one student and the teacher or professor, with the lesson to the others being their following along of the logic of enquiry (Gee & Green, 1998). So, it is not the handing over of the lesson to the students, and certainly not, with an emphasis on purposefulness, allowing them to talk how and to whomever they wish. In fact, in some senses it could, with the expectation of involvement in co-constructing meaning be viewed as even more demanding, oppressive even, then students passively accepting transmitted knowledge. For certainly, it is not a given that all students wish to be actively engaged in their learning at all times, however much we might wish them to be. From the viewpoint of the teacher, dialogic teaching may seem liberatory for the students, however, as they may be required to actively think out loud, it may not seem so for the student.

This work centred around dialogic teaching has been developed and expanded on notably by Neil Mercer (Mercer, 1995, 2000; Canal Barnaby, 2020) which has resulted in the Cambridge Oracy Project and given a solid research foundation to the charity Voice 21. Mercer (Canal Barnaby 2020) posits clearly that knowledge is jointly created and envisions oracy as being able 'to articulate collaborative reasoning processes' (Holmes-Henderson & Wright, 2023, p. 89). This co-creation of knowledge largely through spoken language is a key conceptualisation of how students learn in and out of school. Whilst dialogic teaching is a repertoire of techniques the mechanisms of learning through language is a much broader and deeper field of study.

The purported mechanism behind the use of dialogic repertoires is that learning is constructed using language and that it occurs in what Vygotsky describes as the Zone of Proximal

Development wherein a child is able to go beyond what they were initially capable of with the help of a More Knowledgeable Other.

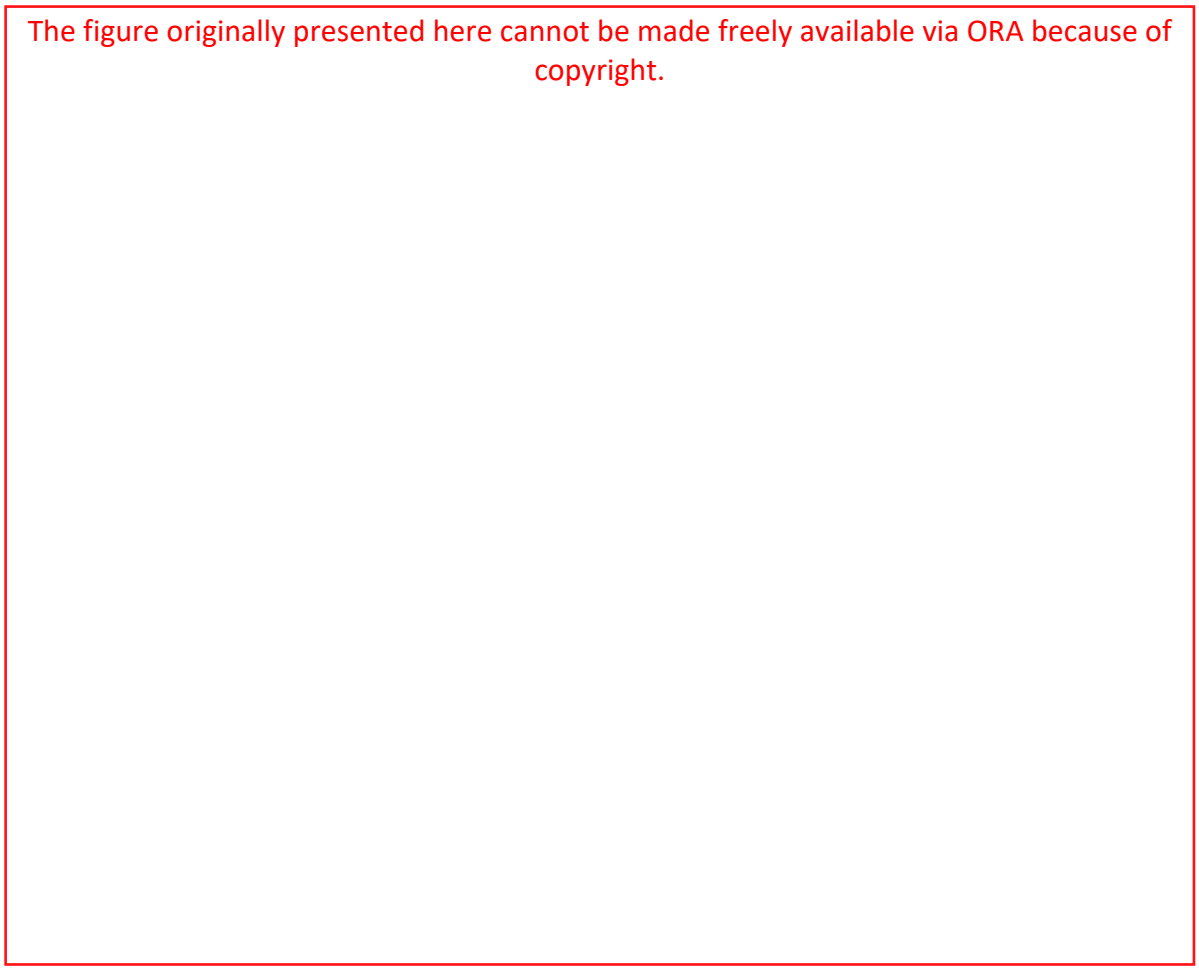


Figure 1: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as envisioned by an online learning resource

Developmentally that more knowledgeable other is usually a parent in the early stages of a child's life but can come to include others later on. Educationally, the focus then becomes to what extent the teacher is the more knowledgeable other compared to other others. In the diagram taken from an online learning resource helpfulprofessor.com, it shows "teacher[s]", whilst first, on a par with "parent[s]" and "peer[s]" – ignoring the typo in the graphic.

Moreover, it gives a lot of weight to “Educational Technologies”, perhaps unsurprisingly given it is one itself, and then attempts to define “Scaffolds” with a series of talk moves, it does not address a prevalent feature of the English teacher’s classroom in England – written scaffolding (Gibbons, 2019).

Written Scaffolding

How scaffolding (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018) is envisaged varies widely across educational research and it is difficult to be precise about what the term means in different contexts. Conceptually, it was introduced as a dedicated educational term by Bruner in 1975 and refers to a range of ways in which a more knowledgeable other actively enables a child to learn and develop by providing calibrated assistance as it is needed. Whilst this has clear parallels to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, Vygotsky himself did not use the term. As a result of the consistent use of scaffolding Brownfield and Wilkinson (2018, p. 180) posit that “the learner might require less assistance over time” and that the premise is that the responsibility for the learning will gradually pass from the teacher to the learner. Scaffolding is meant to come down.

However, to what extent it does come down and allows children to learn independently is open to question. For in a school system with a Brunerian spiral curriculum, the children should be experiencing ever more complex and challenging learning, which would require more, albeit re-calibrated scaffolding. Moreover, what is referred to as scaffolding, may not in a strict Brunerian sense, be that at all. Brownfield and Wilkinson’s (2018) meta-analysis identifies numerous techniques that are designated in their respective studies as scaffolding,

but, where defined, differ from each other widely enough for it to be considered problematic to envisage them as directly comparable.

The Brownfield and Wilkinson (2018, p. 188) analysis makes a series of recommendations with regards to future research, most notably that what is considered scaffolding is more clearly delineated and includes the intersubjective interactions between student and teacher, balancing the focus of studies away from the teacher's moves. Alongside this there is the acknowledgement that little has been done to measure impact through outcome data for students, which seems diametrically opposed to the data-linked accountability trend in UK secondary education. Tellingly they deduce that, "[they] cannot conclude with reasonable surety that such scaffolding is productive for children's literacy learning." Despite this, discourses on the use and efficacy of scaffolding abound in the UK education system.

In the secondary English classroom, what is commonly referred to as 'scaffolding' is more likely to be some type of writing frame, wherein it is not necessarily knowledge or a skill that it is designed to expediate, but a particular genre of written outcome, or indeed a specific piece of completed writing on the child's part. With a piece of written scaffolding in front of a child it can give that child independence from the teacher, or at the very least the illusion of independent working.

Gibbons (2017, 2019) writes of the ubiquity of certain types of written scaffolding in the English classroom, with the PEE chain or variants of it being most prominent. However, there does not seem to be a clear academic basis to account for this, it seems, according to Gibbons to have occurred organically as a response to policy frameworks such as the introduction of

the National Curriculum in 1989, and the educational reforms instigated by the New Labour government from 1997 onwards. Whilst these have been mooted to be beneficial by resource providers (Gibbons, 2019) and some educational consultants such as PiXL (personal communication in CPD session) there is little research evidence to support the claims. However, PiXL and other educational consultants have come under fire for trying to "game" the system (Wiggins, 2016), and it is possible that a culture of trying to 'game' the writing system has helped spread these constructs. Concurrently, during the period of the New Labour government 1997-2010 the notion that too much teacher talking time TTT was a negative and in performance review and Ofsted observations teachers (Cook, 2000) were under pressure to reduce it. In 2011 Maddern, quoting an Ofsted inspector writes negatively about "talking too much" in an editorial aimed at articulating what inspectors are looking for during a lesson observation. Implied in the article (Maddern, 2011) is also that the "best teachers" will "move from group to group" clearly implying an institutional preference for group work. In this scenario, it is probable that having a set of written procedures for students to follow rather than relying on teacher-student dialogue would reassure the teacher. I have lived experience of senior leaders and Ofsted inspectors measuring and commenting on the amount of Teacher Talking Time in my lesson, with less being clearly preferred. Gibbons (2019) attributes this to policymakers adopting "work of the genre theorists in Australia" (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993) whilst admitting that the use of PEE-type written scaffolding may be a necessary, if not loved, response "to negotiate high stakes assessment systems".

In relation to dialogue, it is interesting to note that Gibbons (2019) on p. 13, when discussing the modelling of writing, chooses to emphasis not the benefits of structure, but:

"Although offering support for structure can be a function of modelling writing, it's probably true to say that the real value of the approach is in making explicit the thoughts and choices a writer has and makes in the process of composing text. Those who model writing well think aloud so that the complex and secretive art of writing is exposed for all to see." (Gibbons, 2019, p. 13)

Whilst this is monologic in perspective, in a real classroom we would not be surprised to see some dialogic exchanges in the elicitation of these "thoughts and choices". It could be construed as the teacher telling the story of the construction of the piece of writing, as Hicks (1996) might argue learning being here a "Prosaic Art". In fact, it may be possible to go even further and suggest that that written scaffolding is latent dialogue, willing the student accessing it to engage in an internal dialogue about it if working alone, as part of a group discourse if working in a small group, or as part of Gee and Green's (1998) communities of practice, either in smaller groups or as part of whole class dialogue. Gee and Green (1998, p. 123) also assert that cultural models can be viewed as "story lines". These cultural models are "much like a plot of a group-constructed (oral or written) story". Hicks' and Gee's ideas build on constructivist models of learning as espoused by Vygotsky, but also build on the work of Jerome Bruner (2004) who delineated a notion of 'Life as Narrative'. Perhaps, then, written scaffolding in the English Literature critique is a tool to help tell the story of both the text that is being examined, Shakespeare, or what you will, and the hitherto unwritten text that is the student's response to that literature. How this scaffolding is transformed into text is mediated by the norms and expectations of the community of practice – which can be strongly social – to expect a student to produce an individual, original response, in a group co-created narrative is asking for them to defy social conventions. Gibbons' (2017) group of English teachers in initial teacher training were perhaps expecting just that, however, simultaneously identifying that within this approach students "don't have a voice". Can that voice perhaps come from a

dialogic examination of the written scaffold? It is tempting to think so, however, all voices in the classroom are not equal and some students may very well not only not get a voice, but even feel socially compelled to attempt to tell the narrative in the voice of another student or the teacher.

Moreover, written scaffolding, alongside for example educational technology developments may act as a more knowledgeable other, but crucially lack the ability to refine and calibrate this support, which an experienced teacher would do either consciously or subconsciously. This became apparent through a natural experiment when the global Covid-19 pandemic (EEF, 2022) resulted in a large number of students being unable to physically attend school. Amongst numerous negative impacts of this (Holt & Murray, 2022) children themselves cited not being in school and seeing friends as well as the documented lack of learning opportunities, despite the surge in Ed Tech usage. What was missing for these children was not scaffolding, but communities of practice in which to hold intersubjective discourses.

Discourses

Bronfenbrenner (1979) constructed an ecological model to codify how a person, a school-age child in this instance, is influenced at differing levels. The five levels range from the ones wholly or largely outside of the child's control, the chronosystem, macrosystem and exosystem, to one in which the child may have some agency, albeit limited at times, the mesosystem, and finally, the most influential, the microsystem, their immediate peers and relations, which is not only the most directly influential, it is also the one in which they have the greatest agency. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner centres the idea that it is the world as the child perceives it to be that influences their behaviours and interactions, and that this world-making is a two-way process of interactions between the child and those around them.

Figure 2: A Visual Interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems

Whilst exosystemic and macrosystemic pressures may exist for the child to be successful academically as measured by examinations at determined points in their school career, it is apparent that the day-to-day classroom behaviours and view-of-self-as-a-student are forged in the individual interactions with peers and adults in the classroom, in the corridors and lunch halls and at home during discourses with friends, siblings, and parents. Moreover, this world and identity making, influenced by school systems of accountability and neo-liberal ideas

about academic progress, is negotiated within these constraints rather than the child purposefully aiming to reproduce them.

It is likely then that adolescent students are not solely focused on classroom dialogue as a mechanism for learning, but rather as a focal point for identity building, social conformity or non-conformity, and may in fact need to rapidly assess the importance of the interaction and which of the influences in their microsystem they are prioritising. In essence, it is not necessarily the words that are spoken that we need to consider, but how they are received and perceived in that moment. Bahtkinian (1981) discourses are developed by Gee in particular (Gee & Green, 1998) to apply to classroom environments. Gee and Green (1998 p. 126) explore the importance of discourse analysis in society in general, but are specific about its ability to shed light on what happens in the classroom:

"Discourse analysis, then, when guided by an ethnographic perspective, forms a basis for identifying what members of a social group (e.g. a classroom or other educational setting) need to know, produce, predict, interpret, and evaluate in a given setting or social group to participate appropriately." (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 126)

It is pertinent to any changes in practices in the classroom then that students must on the spot reevaluate what it is that the teacher and situation demands. If practitioners are researching students' attitudes, students will then try to establish what is expected of them, linking these expectations to previous experiences. These may include similar practices from other teachers or student-voice exercises. These discourses run concurrently to their social discourses amongst their peer group. Therefore, when trying to ascertain whether certain practices, such as dialogic repertoires are preferred or not by students, it is in the moment of asking that they make those decisions, it does not necessarily follow that academic success, in such measures

as higher grades on an exam question, would influence the students' responses. Nor, outside of discourses specifically focused on exam success, would exam success be the primary driver of student behaviours and interactions in the classroom. Moreover, the relationship between the student and the researcher, whether a teacher-practitioner-researcher, or someone from an outside institution, would affect the outcome of any qualitative research data generated. These outcomes, the data, should be considered in relation then to the discourses that the children perceive themselves to be in.

In relation to quantitative data, participants might then not acknowledge the links between changes in outcomes and the factors researchers believe caused these changes. It is likely that children will be attempting to engage in discourses that are most relevant to their microsystem, friends and peers in the classroom, and that the discourses that teachers may wish to forefront, such as examination success, rooted in the conceptually more distant macrosystem, are merely parameters within which students aim to manipulate agency towards what is immediately important to them in their microsystem.

Student Voice and Power Dynamics

Which discourses students may believe they are participating in during practitioner research may not match the discourses that a teacher-practitioner believes that they are engaged in. From previous research it seemed evident to me that when asking students for their opinions and experiences of things in school that they view these as student voice activities wherein they some, albeit limited, agency to affect the way that things are done either in this particular class, or in the school as a whole. It was made clear to the students from the beginning, planned in as part of the process of gaining ethical approval, the type and extent of the

research project and that it was not intended to be a form of student voice, nor engender immediate change. However, during this previous research in the school students seemed to think that their responses would be taken as student voice and that there might be changes to school procedures as a result of this.

Leading on from this is perhaps pertinent to acknowledge that students may be subject to social acceptability bias (Elliott, 2023, p. 48) in particular if the data generated is done so in a public sphere. Elliott explicitly states that it "can be … a problem in practitioner research".

Student voice is often seen as democratically aligned with even a sense of Freire's emancipatory "*pedagogia liberadora*" (Barros, 2020, p. 160), however it can also be used in ways which (Skerrit, 2022) could be considered Foucauldian, as instruments that attempt surveillance and control over the practices of classroom teachers by senior leaders or administrators. Therefore, students may when research data is being generated, recourse to and make connections between modes of discourse most similar in their experience to this. For many, this may be student voice activities of one type or another, such as questionnaires, surveys, individual or group interviews – all stalwarts of qualitative social science research (Cohen, Manion, Morrison & Bell, 2018) which it could be argued, student voice is a bastardisation of. At this point, students may enter a discourse of liberation, or gaining of agency, believing that the intention of the data generation is to change processes in accordance with their views.

Summary

To summarise, for teachers there are discourses of accountability and efficacy in their practice in which they are expected to enable their students to make progress and achieve well in high stakes assessments. Ideologically and politically talk in the classroom involves

discourses on student empowerment and agency, as well as whether or not it is effective at driving progress. In the English classroom in the United Kingdom, written scaffolding such as essay plans, PEEL chains and sentence starters have become ubiquitous and almost *de rigeur*, without there necessarily being solid research evidence to support their use. Educational discourses on performance have become data-driven, leading to a structural and systemic preference for RCTs and research that utilises quantitative measures, although this is not necessarily the norm in educational research as a whole. Attempts to garner students' opinions, in the form of student voice, brings into play power differentials within the classroom, but also within school leadership and can lead to students *de facto* use of some of the instruments of social science qualitative research as opportunities to leverage power and agency from the teacher or teacher-researcher.

Intuitively, the notion that giving students more time to write would result in more writing needs to be tested against 'what works' in enabling students to write effectively towards criteria-referenced norms such as examination mark-schemes. This feeds into professional judgements about how to structure lesson time. However, with an emphasis on the student as a stakeholder in their learning, to what extent they understand and appreciate the techniques used to help them to make progress needs to be looked at. Moreover, given the political nature of discourses surrounding classroom talk and positioned as democratic and emancipatory, the extent to which they are actually wanted by students is perhaps ideologically overlooked.

Key Questions

1. **What is the relationship between classroom time given to dialogue about written scaffolding and students' written outcomes?**
2. **How effective are written scaffolding structures with and without prior discussion?**
3. **What are students' perceptions of the efficacy of written scaffolding and classroom dialogue in preparation for crafting written responses?**

Methodology

Key Questions:

1. **What is the relationship between classroom time given to dialogue about written scaffolding and students' written outcomes?**
2. **How effective are written scaffolding structures with and without prior discussion?**
3. **What are students' perceptions of the efficacy of written scaffolding and classroom dialogue in preparation for crafting written responses?**

The research attempted to gauge student attitudes towards the use of talk and written scaffolding in relation to writing using qualitative methods, put in place a short classroom-based intervention with variables of written scaffolding (Appendix C) and dialogic teaching methods, and then determine if the intervention has affected the student attitudes. The efficacy of the three approaches to the three tasks (Appendix B) in the intervention was measured using two quantitative methods, a mean word count and a mean mark out of 30 based on GCSE English Literature mark schemes. Immediately prior to the intervention a paper-based Likert-scale questionnaire was completed by all students (Appendix A) to ascertain their feelings and attitudes, and this same questionnaire was readministered post-intervention to ascertain if the intervention and its results had changed student perceptions. Subsequent to this the majority of the class were asked their opinion in individual semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) with notes taken by the teacher-researcher and then inductively coded thematically and using *in vivo* codes.

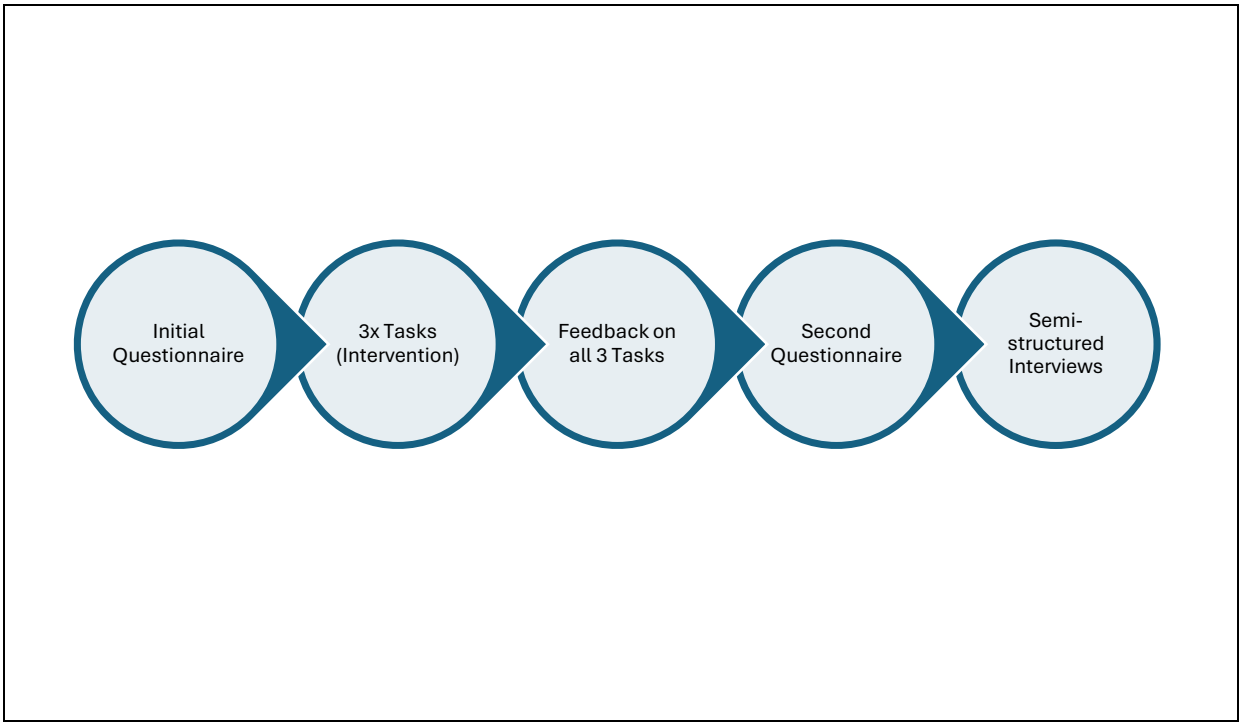


Figure 3: The research process

As a piece of practitioner research (Edwards & Talbot, 2014) a classroom-based intervention was planned wherein a group of 19 Year 9, 13–14-year-old, students were given the same amount of time overall, 45 minutes within a continuous lesson to answer a GCSE-style question on three separate occasions on an extract from a literature text they had studied, Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'. For each question they were given different levels of support:

1. The extract and the question
2. A written scaffold, the extract and the question
3. A written scaffold, 20 minutes of teacher-led dialogic examination of the scaffold, the extract and the question

Crucial to the intervention is that whilst for Task 1 and Task 2 they had up to 45 minutes in which to write their responses, due to the 20 minutes of dialogic examination of the written scaffolding students only wrote for up to 25 minutes in Task 3.

Table 1: the differences between the tasks in the intervention

Task	Written Scaffold	Dialogic Examination	Time for Writing
Extract Question 1	None	None	45 minutes
Extract Question 2	Provided	None	45 minutes
Extract Question 3	Provided	20 minutes	25 minutes

As a small-scale practitioner research project it was not feasible to design a Randomised Control Trial, despite RCTs being favoured be the Education Endowment Foundation as described by Nevill in her blog (2019) and Edovald and Nevill (2021) in a resulting academic paper, after initially being championed by Goldacre (2013). Instead, using only one class the intervention was designed to be as similar as possible across the three tasks apart from the key changes which it was designed to measure relating to written scaffolding and the dialogic examination of written scaffolding.

This intervention would be measured quantitatively through two measures:

1. A mean word count for each of the three tasks to see as objectively as possible whether the changes in approach translated into meaningful changes in the amount of written work produced
2. Each of the three tasks would be graded against the AQA English Literature Paper 1 mark scheme – the one on which 'Romeo and Juliet' extracts are examined; a mean GCSE mark for each Task would be calculated, giving a largely objective measure, however issues of subjectivity exist in the marking of GCSE English Literature scripts.
3. Data was processed using the JASP open-source statistical software program

Issues surrounding the validity of the data generated need to be addressed here.

Firstly, in the mean word count: the amount a person writes on any given day is variable and could be affected by a whole host of physical or psychological or social factors, e.g. tiredness or heat or lack of hydration (Pawson, Gardner, Doherty, Martin, Soares, & Edmonds, 2013). However, in the absence of the ability to test and adjust results for those variables, I had to assume that variations in them would be random and even themselves out across both the class and across the three tasks. To mitigate these effects, the three tasks were done in the same lesson at the same time on the same day of the week across three weeks. I also discounted the probably minimal psychological development through time, from a Piagetian perspective as discussed in Moshman (2009), of three weeks, and instead made the methodological assumption that any developmental changes in the ability to do the tasks would be to do with constructivist, Vygotskyian (1978;1987) reasons – i.e. interaction with a More Knowledgeable Other in the form of written scaffolding or dialogic teaching repertoires. The effect that cannot be quantified is that of practice of the task, the baseline assessment – Task 1 – was the first time that students had attempted this type of task and by Task 3 they would have had two previous attempts at similar tasks. To what extent this familiarisation with the task would the outcomes compared to the other changes remains unclear. Moreover, the nature of English as a subject is that texts vary in their conceptual complexity both across texts and within the same text. Three different extracts were used, of similar length and from the same source – a GCSE revision resources bank – however, it is also unclear whether students found them equally accessible, regardless of the other changes to the methodology.

Secondly, in the mean GCSE Grade: grading of papers at GCSE in English Literature is to some extent subjective and whilst the exam boards have rigorous quality assurance measures regarding marking, even then there are challenges to this each year. The marking of the questions would be by me as the teacher-researcher. Although an experienced exam-marker from the AQA Board in this English Literature Paper 1, it is possible, and indeed probable that some unconscious bias would creep into the data generated. Elliott (2023) discusses the notion that for educational researchers "data collection" is probably a misnomer and a more accurate term would be "data generation"; at this point, by marking the responses and using those marks I am very clearly generating my own data. Potential mitigations to this could have been to have someone other than myself mark them, but these were rejected for practical reasons as follows:

a. Neither of my two closest collaborators on the project, the Assistant Headteacher for Quality of Education, and the Lead Practitioner were English Literature subject specialists
b. Their collaboration is based on the presumption of me following a 'What Works' (Edovald & Nevill, 2021) approach and there might be the possibility that bias towards what would be perceived as a successful outcome might creep in
c. In my department I was the most experienced exam marker
d. If more than one person had marked the scripts it could have potentially worsened the subjectivity of the data generated as different individuals could each interpret the mark scheme differently
e. It was not feasible to ask another individual colleague to mark all potentially 57 exam scripts on their own in addition to their usual workload
f. Similarly, points d. and e. would also apply if I had marked the responses and then asked a colleague or colleagues to collaborate in moderating them

On balance I felt that by approaching each script in the same way any unconscious bias would remain unconscious and have a similar effect across each Task, remaining a constant and thereby mostly negating its adverse effects on the telling of the story of the results.

Feedback is a driver of performance according to an EEF systematic review (Newman, Kwan, Schucan, Bird & Hoo, 2021), and it was therefore deemed preferable to leave the feedback on individual tasks until all tasks had been completed to try and minimise external inputs not directly related to the planned intervention. Again, it is possible that students might be unhappy with doing a further task before receiving feedback on the previous one. It is also possible that not receiving feedback on previous tasks may adversely affect motivation for future ones; however, as the first and third task were in effect only two weeks apart, and the department standard for returning marked work is two weeks, I felt that this was likely less of an issue than the prospect of feedback influencing the results. Additionally, with my positionality as originally coming to educational research from a 'What Works' perspective it felt better to have results that were slightly down on what they could be, but that show the intervention 'works', than have the possibility of the intervention not being the main cause of change.

In addition to measuring quantitatively the effects of the intervention, qualitative methods were used to try to ascertain students' views on and experiences of the intervention.

Prior to and after getting the results of the three tasks in the intervention students were given the same 4-point Likert scale questionnaire. In the questionnaires a four-point Likert scale was used to force students to make a decision (Cohen et al., 2018) this was picked up on by one student who had expressed a desire to select the middle option for all questions, suggesting that it was their usual method of answering questionnaires. This raises ethical questions as to the extent in which school-based research, and indeed schools' attempts to generate 'student voice' are designed and conducted in such a way that leverages the power-imbalances between adults and children in the setting. Babione and Anderkin (2015, p. 63) encapsulates this:

"Although youth may be asked for their opinions, they may or may not have a role in choosing what information is sought, or how that information will be collected and analysed." (Babione & Anderkin, 2015, p. 63)

In fact, Taherdoost's (2022, p. 11) guide to creating questionnaires suggests that "providing these [don't know] options can be helpful to satisfy the respondents". In effect by trying to force a response in my gathering of data I am prioritising my research needs over the comfort of the children.

Collaborating informally with other teachers in the English department we came up with 13 questions using a 4-point Likert scale that, for practicality, fit comfortably and legibly onto one side of printed A4 paper. The result of this was, however, to make the questionnaires look and feel remarkably similar to printed worksheets that teachers might hand out and expect students to complete as part of their classwork, again power-dynamics in the classroom could come into play.

The two questionnaires were to be administered either side of the three tasks that constituted the intervention with the intention of ascertaining whether the process of the intervention changed students' attitudes to the use of dialogic techniques and written scaffolding in class.

The final qualitative research method was a semi-structured interview (Denscombe 2017) with selected students to get a sense of their understanding of the process and whether they could make connections between written scaffolding and dialogic processes. Again, practical constraints meant that as some of these would need to be conducted in class, during class time, the decision was made for all of them to be conducted in that way. Ethical approval for recording either audio or video had not been sought, therefore the results were generated via notes taken during the interviews. The notes were inductively coded with mostly *in vivo* coding after all the interviews took place.

By positioning the interviews in the classroom during class time they ran the risk of being seen by students as part of the discourses (Gee & Green, 1998) of the classroom rather than a separate reflection on what takes place within the classroom. Furthermore, in so doing, students are in the gaze of their peers and may adjust their responses accordingly. However, in conducting the interviews in this way it is possible to hear more of the students' voices ensuring a greater range and limiting selection biases.

Ethical Considerations

Whilst ethical approval was sought and gained via the CUREC process, Research ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_23_338 and the research followed BERA guidelines, there were some more nuanced ethical considerations that need to be addressed.

During the course of the research, it became clear that some students, whilst having been clearly informed otherwise, believed that the research was in fact some form of student voice activity in which their responses could bring about immediate changes to our classroom routines.

Moreover, as all of the data generated was done in the classroom by me as the teacher-researcher the students may well have felt obliged to complete questionnaires and interviews, although subjectively it appeared to me that students were keen to be interviewed. Nevertheless, from observation it became apparent that students felt the need to complete the questionnaires because they believed I expected it from them like a piece of classwork. In the semi-structured interviews one student even asked for a reward point for having completed it, something that culturally in the school is associated with the completion of high-quality work.

The three tasks that comprised the intervention were, as negotiated with the Key Stage 3 Lead for English used instead of those students' normal in class formal assessment. Collaboration with the Key Stage 3 Lead ensured that the grades entered for this class were equivalent to those received by other students as these feed into setting decisions at Key Stage 4 and can

have social and educational consequences. The students were told that these intervention tasks were replacing the usual formal assessments, and this may well have created an additional systemic stress on the students as they were being assessed in a new way and differently to their peers in other classrooms.

Collaboration

Pre-Intervention

Early interest in dialogic teaching methods led to me presenting within the department and leading whole-staff CPD on these repertoires and the Vygotskian theoretical underpinnings of the construction of learning with a More Knowledgeable Other. The Assistant Head for Quality of Education, and the Lead Practitioner collaborated with the design of the intervention and data generation tools. It must be stressed that in doing so they very firmly envisaged it as an intervention in the 'what works' educational ideology, and where not at all interested in any emancipatory or democratic agendas. Informal collaboration with other members of the English Department helped in choosing materials including tasks and written scaffolds, and designing questionnaires and possible interview questions.

During the Intervention

Collaboration with the Key Stage 3 English Lead ensured that students in the intervention did not fall behind in the curriculum, nor were they disadvantaged, or advantaged, by a parallel system of assessment for this unit of work.

Post-Intervention

Results and possible implications of the research were shared with the English Department, and more informally with teaching assistants. Sharing the process and experience of this

research has encouraged one colleague to begin a Master's degree course in the current academic year and another is seriously considering it for the next academic year. After the intervention had been completed, I applied for a position at another school; as part of the recruitment process, I was required to write an article for an in-house CPD journal, the theoretical foundations of my research provided the basis for my article. I was successful in obtaining the position and hope to rework that article into the next edition of the in-house CPD journal. Now in this new school I hope to use my findings to develop colleagues' teaching practice as part of this role.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Results from Initial Questionnaire (Appendix A)

a. Writing is more important than talking in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	7	5	5
b. Talking is more important than writing in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	5	6	1

Questions a. and b. were mirror match questions to ensure that students had both understood the question and were being conceptually consistent in how they answered them. The results were consistent in that a majority of students 10/7 believed that talking was more important than writing. This is despite the fact that high stakes assessments at GCSE are terminal, written examinations and in this school KS3 assessments are regular written assignments in exam conditions, i.e. without talking.

c. I like to talk about written work before writing it.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	11	4	0
d. I like to start writing straight away when given a written task.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	4	9	1

Similarly, Questions c. and d. were mirror match questions, however there was a discrepancy between the two. When “talk” was positioned first in the questionnaire a large number of students were positive about it 13/17 vs 4/17 disagreeing, more so than in the previous two questions. However, when asked about wanting to “start writing straight away” this pattern

was not repeated as strongly with 7/17 wanting to start writing straight away and 10/7 not. That the intervening period would be filled with talk about the work could be inferred but was not explicit. As a researcher interested in dialogic processes, my positionality would presume that this implication was obvious – however, it may not have been to the takers of the questionnaire.

e. I prefer to talk to the teacher about my work than other students.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	3	6	6
f. I prefer to talk to other students about my work than the teacher.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8	7	2	0

Again, Questions e. and f. were designed to test validity as mirror-match questions and again, whilst general patterns were upheld, it was not an exact match. When putting the "teacher" as the main idea in the statement 5/17 agreed and 12/17 disagreed. Reversing this, making the "other students" paramount strengthened students views as to the desirability of conversations with peers – this is echoed strongly in the semi-structured interviews – 15/17 agreeing with 8 of those 15 strongly agreeing. Only 2 disagreed. This is the most decisive of any of the questions.

g. I need scaffolding such as writing frames or sentence starters to write well.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	5	11	1
h. I prefer to not use scaffolding such as writing frames when writing in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	9	6	0

Once again, Questions g. and h. are intended to mirror each other, but are imprecise in their wording, so not a genuine mirroring: g. prioritising the outcomes, whereas h. prioritises the

preferences surrounding processes of writing. Despite this, the two seem to converge conceptually with 12/17 not "need[ing] scaffolding" and 11/17 "prefer[ring] not to use" it.

i. I prefer to talk about the scaffolding with my teacher before beginning to write.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	7	8	1
j. I prefer to start writing using the scaffolding without talking about it.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	10	5	1

The final pair that mirror just each other is questions i. and j. which did not match. There was a fairly even split between agreeing and disagreeing about talking about "scaffolding with my teacher" 8/17 agreeing and 9/17 disagreeing. However, when presented with the option to start writing without talking about the scaffolding a clear majority 11/17 opted for that preference.

k. I like to talk about my work with one partner.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	7	7	0
l. I like to talk about my work in a small group.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	8	7	0
m. I do not like to talk about my work with other students.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	3	7	6

The final three questions k., l., and m. were designed to offer insight into preferences regarding interactions with peers. In retrospect the wording was clumsily designed and whilst the format kept fidelity with the rest of the questionnaire, it did not sufficiently delineate the absolute preference for modes of peer-to-peer communication.

Question k. showed people wanting to talk with one partner on the whole 10/17, but it does not elaborate as to what the alternative would be: no discussion or working in a small group. Similarly, 10/17 students "like to talk about my work in a small group", but does not tell us how the 7/10 who disagreed preferred to work. It would appear that some of the students disagreeing with k. or l. were stating a preference for either partner talk or small group talk as 13/17 disagreed with "not lik[ing] to talk about my work with other students" 6 of these "Strongly" disagreeing – which would imply a strong preference for either partner talk or small group talk. This also matches the 6/17 who strongly disagreed with preferring to talk to the teacher rather than other students in Question e.

Word Counts and GCSE Mark Scheme Results

Due to the small sample size and lack of complexity regarding the quantitative data I decided to use whole numbers for word counts, rounded up or down for mean word counts, and whole numbers for marks, but to two decimal places for mean marks due to the small numbers involved.

From the positionality of a teacher-researcher who held a Teaching and Learning Responsibility, TLR, specifically for interventions, it was important to me that the intervention 'worked' – in that it produced better outcomes for students judged by school priorities linked to accountability measures. Importantly in connection with the collaboration with the Quality of Education Assistant Headteacher on designing and implementing this intervention, it was clear the emphasis on 'what works' – at least in this setting – and its dissemination within the school was a priority above the broader research aims. Whilst being aware that as a researcher, an intervention that did not work is equally valuable, and perhaps

with the published research bias towards successful interventions (Elliott, 2023) possibly even more so, years of accountability processes in schools have conditioned me to want the numbers to show progress. In my discussions with the Assistant Head, who was originally a PE teacher, the discourses were ones of student progress and efficacy, even likening the JASP-generated chart showing the change in word count over the three tasks to a person going to the gym to get in shape. This was a discourse of strength and change and progress. In short, both the mean word counts and the mean GCSE marks improved over the three tasks in the intervention. As a TLR holder and teacher this made me feel successful and more confident in my discussions with collaborators who were above me in the school hierarchy.

However, as the research is looking at the relationship between dialogue and written scaffolding, the data generated needs to be more closely looked at through the nexus of the children involved.

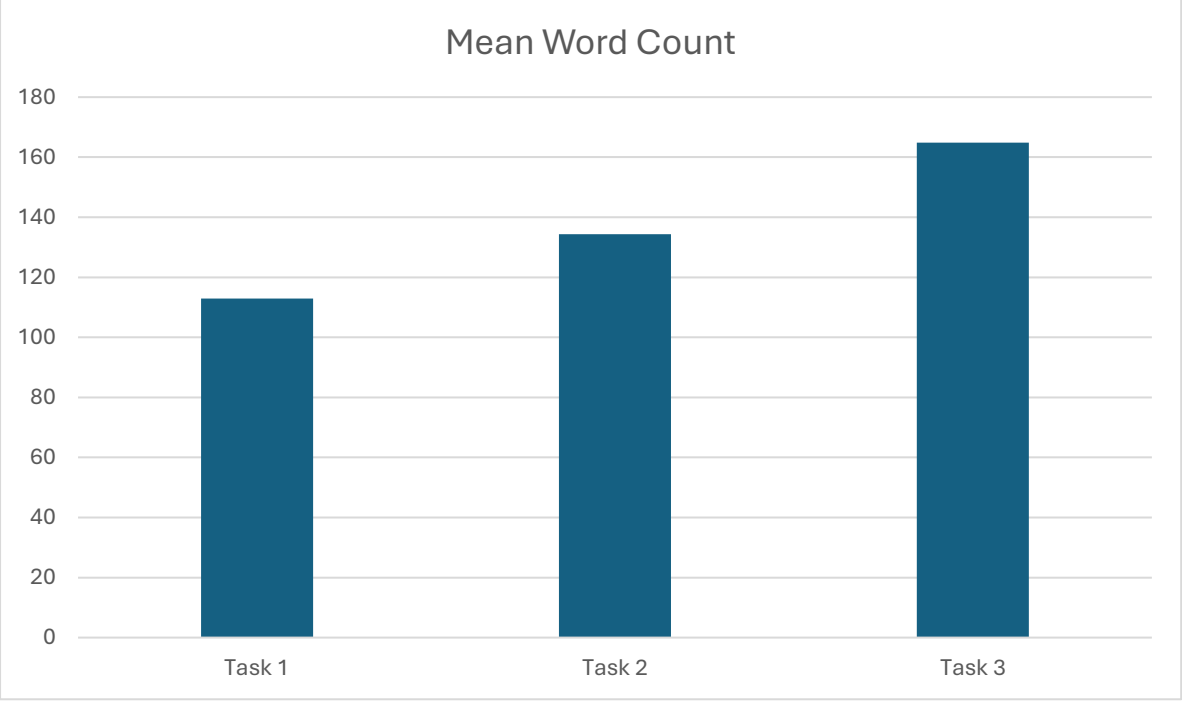


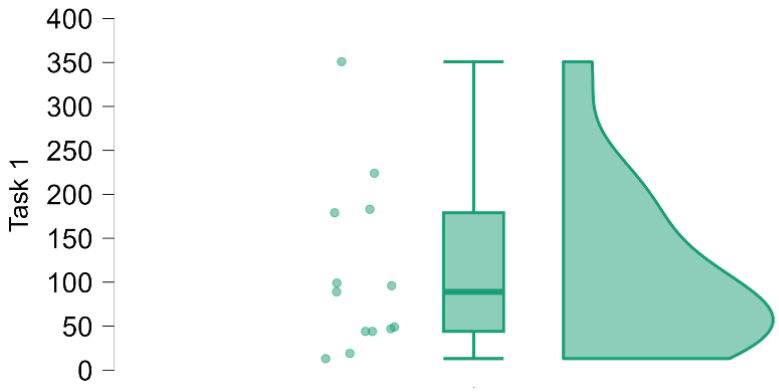
Figure 4: Mean word count

Table 2: Mean Word Count Descriptive Statistics

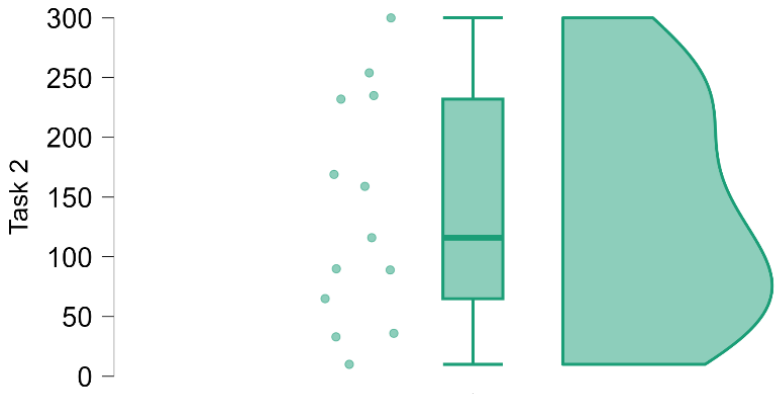
Descriptive Statistics			
	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Valid	16	17	16
Missing	3	2	3
Mean	112.938	134.353	164.875
Std. Deviation	96.238	92.177	103.163
Coefficient of variation	0.852	0.686	0.626
Variance	9261.796	8496.618	10642.650
Range	338.000	290.000	284.000
Minimum	13.000	10.000	16.000
Maximum	351.000	300.000	300.000

Mean Word Count Raincloud Plots

Task 1



Task 2



Task 3

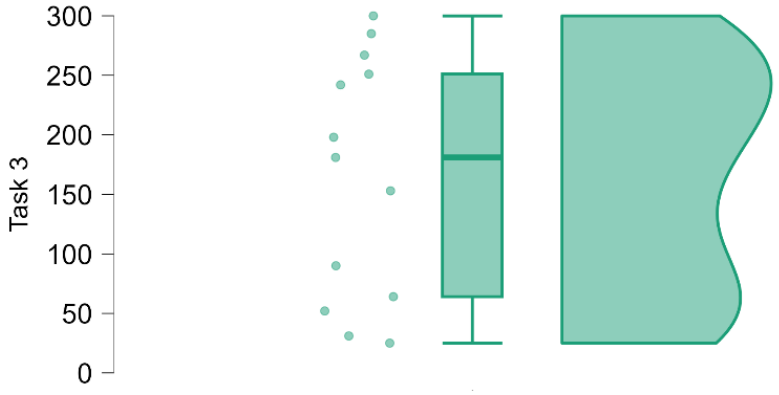


Figure 5: Mean Word Count Raincloud Plots

A clear, steady progression in mean word count was observed. From Task 1, the 'cold' baseline, the mean word count was 113, which rose by 21 to 134 for Task 2, the scaffolded question, and finally another rise of 31 to 165 was generated for Task 3, a scaffolded question where class time had been given over to dialogic examination of the scaffold. Whilst the intervention was designed to show that it is not necessarily time given to writing that makes the difference, the effect of student mastery of the task by having the scaffolded and dialogically-examined scaffolded tasks subsequent to the 'cold' task cannot be determined in the scope of this investigation. There is not a direct word-count to grade correlation in GCSE Literature examinations *per se*. However, to secure pass or good pass grades in the mark scheme it is imperative that students make "sustained" responses in order to obtain marks in Level 4 (AQA , 2023) or at the very least "a range of…" to obtain marks in Level 3 of the mark scheme. By implication the responses need to have enough words in them in order to meet these criteria. Of importance in its implications is the fact that more words were written in the shortest time given for the writing because the intervention had been designed to take some writing time and use it for a dialogic examination of the scaffolding.

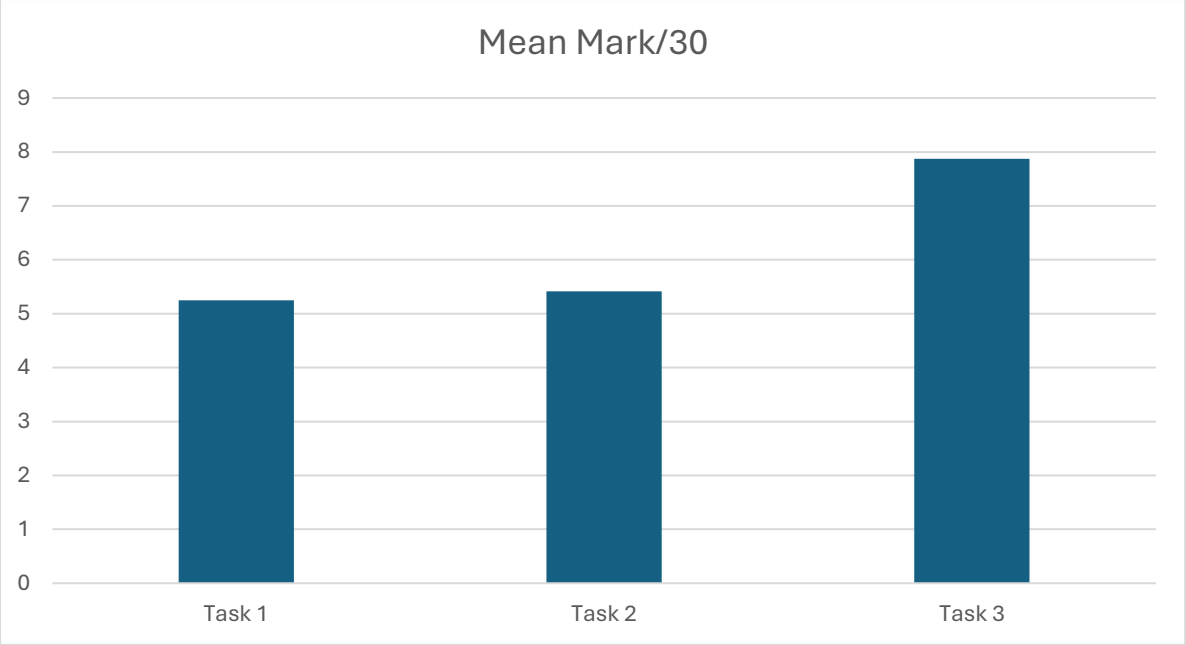


Figure 6: Mean GCSE Mark

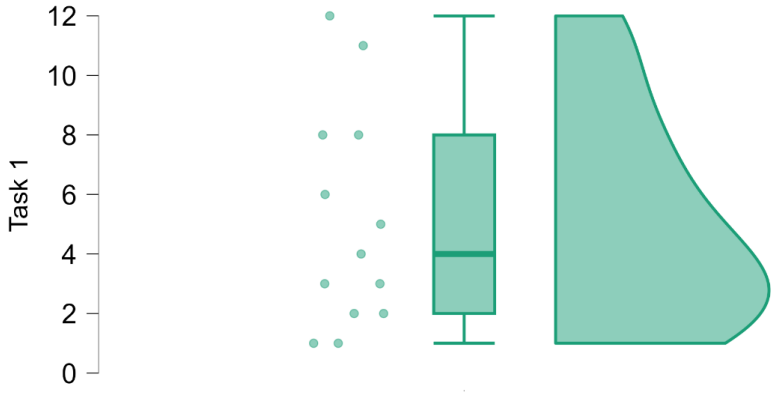
Table 3: Mean GCCSE Marks Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

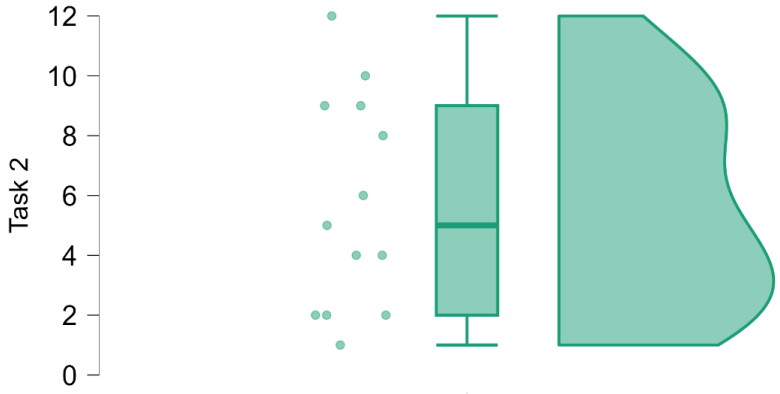
	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
Valid	**16**	**17**	**16**
Missing	**3**	**2**	**3**
Mean	**5.250**	**5.412**	**7.875**
Std. Deviation	**4.187**	**3.355**	**4.193**
Coefficient of variation	**0.798**	**0.620**	**0.532**
Variance	**17.533**	**11.257**	**17.583**
Range	**13.000**	**11.000**	**13.000**
Minimum	**1.000**	**1.000**	**2.000**
Maximum	**14.000**	**12.000**	**15.000**

Mean GCSE Mark Raincloud Plots

Task 1



Task 2



Task 3

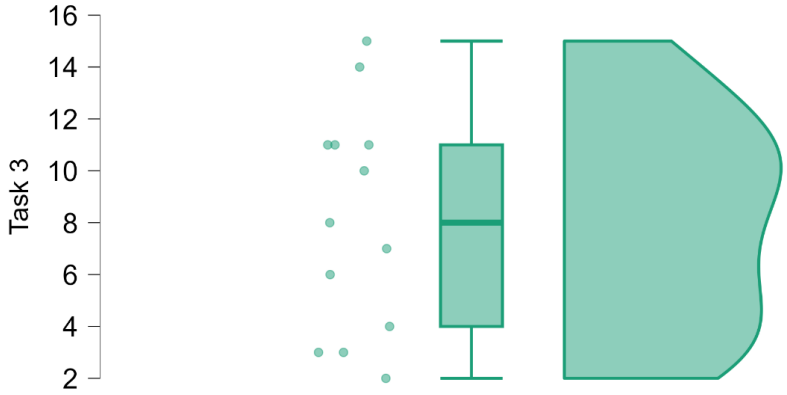


Figure 7: Mean GCSE Marks Raincloud Plots

The was again sustained progression from Task 1, with a mean mark of 5.25, to 5.41in Task 2 and finally a bigger jump to 7.88 in Task 3. Whilst the difference between Task 3 results – the intervention – and the other two is more significant here, it is also potentially more important in that GCSE English Literature or Language is considered a core qualification at age 16. If the intervention is responsible for an increase in GCSE marks, then potentially the intervention – in this setting and with this group of students – could have considerable positive impacts on their end results. A note of caution needs to be sounded here about causation, which will be discussed after the findings have been laid out. Moreover, whilst efforts are made at standardisation, the marking of GCSE Literature papers is to some extent subjective and a marker who was the 2.63 marks that separated Task 1 and Task 3 off the chief examiner's mark for a script would still be considered 'in tolerance' and the mark allowed.

Results from Post-intervention Questionnaire (Appendix A)

These second questionnaires were completed after all the tasks had been completed and students had received numerical feedback: word counts and marks out of 30, as well as formative feedback. Students knew how well they had done on each task before completing the second set of questionnaires.

The corresponding numbers from the initial survey are in parentheses.

a. Writing is more important than talking in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0 (0)	7(7)	6 (5)	4 (5)
b. Talking is more important than writing in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4 (5)	8 (5)	4 (6)	1 (1)

Questions a. and b. were close matches in the initial questionnaire but had slightly diverged after the intervention: more students 12/17 from 10/17 agreed that talking was more important than writing in the second set of results. There may have been numerous reasons for this – it could simply be a move away from a normal distribution to show greater engagement with the questionnaire post-intervention, or on the contrary, it could be that more students were attempting to centralise their response, trying to negate the effect of the 4-point rather than 5-point Likert scale thought to be preferable (Cohen et al., 2018) to avoid participants choosing a default middle option, but chose to put it to the left rather than the right. One student very pointedly chose to circle all the same responses to each question on the questionnaire.

c. I like to talk about written work before writing it.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3 (2)	9 (11)	4 (4)	1 (0)
d. I like to start writing straight away when given a written task.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2 (3)	4 (4)	8 (9)	3 (1)

However, c. and d. did match each other fairly closely 12/17; 5/17 and 6/17; 11/17 and did not differ much from the initial results. However, in this instance the number of strong responses had increased suggesting a hardening of students' views on this post intervention.

e. I prefer to talk to the teacher about my work than other students.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0 (2)	3 (3)	11 (6)	3 (6)
f. I prefer to talk to other students about my work than the teacher.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3 (8)	10 (7)	3 (2)	1 (0)

Contrarily, in the next pairing, e. and f. concerning talking about work either with the teacher or other student it showed that a net number of two students in Question e. had changed their minds post-intervention with 14/17 preferring not to talk to the teacher more than other students, and conversely the opposite was shown with a net two fewer students agreeing that they preferred to speak to other students rather than the teacher. Potentially, this suggests that some students may not have been answering the questionnaire accurately. Or it may suggest that despite the putative success of talking with the teacher the students disliked the process of doing so.

g. I need scaffolding such as writing frames or sentence starters to write well.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 (0)	8 (5)	6 (11)	2 (1)

Perhaps the most significant change as a result of the intervention was the students' perceptions of their need for scaffolding - regardless of dialogue surrounding it. Initially, the majority of students 12/17 felt when answering g. that they did not need written scaffolding in order to "write well". However, post-intervention that majority had flipped and 9/17 believed that they did. It is possible that students had taken scaffolding for granted due to its ubiquitous nature in the modern secondary school classroom. This may be primarily pedagogically driven, but we will discuss the influence of accountability measures and their

politicisation elsewhere. It seems likely that the intervention asking them to concentrate on the interaction with scaffolding concentrated students' minds on its existence.

h. I prefer to not use scaffolding such as writing frames when writing in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 (2)	6 (9)	7 (6)	3 (0)

Responses to the reverse question h. broadly supports this trend flipping from 11/17 "prefer[ring] to not use scaffolding" to only 7/17. We might assume that the remaining 10/17 do prefer to use scaffolding.

i. I prefer to talk about the scaffolding with my teacher before beginning to write.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0 (1)	8 (7)	7 (8)	2 (1)
j. I prefer to start writing using the scaffolding without talking about it.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 (1)	10 (10)	3 (5)	2 (1)

Despite this, there was no significant change in the number of students who wanted to "talk about the scaffolding with [their] teacher" i. 8/17 wanting to and 9/17 preferring not to. Similarly, there was no change in the number of students j. 11/17 who "prefer[ed] to start writing using the scaffolding without talking about it". It would appear that despite students' becoming more aware that scaffolding was important – their perception of talking about it with the teacher as a Vygotskyian 'More Knowledgeable Other' (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987) was unchanged by the intervention.

k. I like to talk about my work with one partner.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2 (3)	7 (7)	6 (7)	2 (0)
l. I like to talk about my work in a small group.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7 (2)	4 (8)	5 (7)	1 (0)

This non-preference for talking with the teacher is borne out by the majority of students expressing a preference for talking about their work with either k. 9/17 "one partner" or l. 11/17 "in a small group". Unfortunately, the design of the questionnaire, as discussed earlier, did not allow for students to indicate which of these two were preferable to each other, and this may have been the result of unconscious researcher bias towards teacher-led dialogue when envisaging the study.

m. I do not like to talk about my work with other students.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 (1)	6 (3)	6 (7)	4 (6)

The 7/17 students in m. who "do not like to talk about [their] work with other students" falls neatly between the 8/17 and 6/17 who disagreed with liking to talk to either partners or in small groups. Again, which talking option was the best second choice for those who did not like to talk about their work with other students was not clarified.

Whilst there was some movement in students' attitudes towards the use of both scaffolding and spoken patterns in the classroom, the findings still suggest that there is a disconnect

between the practices that are effective in the classroom, from a results-driven perspective, and what students want to happen in the classroom.

Individual Semi-Structured Interviews (Appendix D)

Initially, the plan had been for a sample of students to be interviewed, subsequently it seemed possible to interview all of the students in the class, however, unfortunately, some of the students were not interviewed. In a random order 13/19 students gave individual interviews. Notes were inductively coded.

Central to the results of this investigation is whether or not students understand what the interventions and classroom practices done to them mean and to what extent they are supportive of and engaged with them. Collaboration with the Lead Practitioner for Literacy, who had concerns to what extent students, and indeed other teachers, understood what dialogue and dialogic teaching repertoires where, had led to the inclusion of Question 7. "Have you heard of the word 'dialogue'? What does it mean to you?" Tellingly, over half of the respondents were unsure of the meaning and those that did respond positively to the question gave responses that different significantly from what I, as the teacher-researcher, perceived dialogue to mean. Ethically, this *post-hoc* raises the issue of whether or not the student-subjects fully understood what they and parents or guardians had consented to, despite me believing that I had fully explained the process in writing and in person. However, as a counterpoint, the use of dialogic repertoires is a normal part of the way in which I teach, so it was perhaps arguably more the removal of the dialogic process in the first two tasks that was changed in the intervention. For students to write without written scaffolding or with no

dialogic examination of that scaffolding is little different to many tests or indeed, cover lessons.

Question 1 and 2 on school perceptions of 'talking' and its value were broadly positive. Sharing "ideas" was the predominant response with 5 responses actively identifying this. Interestingly one response used a lexical item associated with the primary classroom "magpie" meaning to take ideas and inspiration from other students, which may point to attitudes towards sharing ideas are established early in a student's school life. Most intriguingly from a dialogic perspective and relating to Vygotskyian (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bakhtinian (Hicks, 1996) notions of the constructive and discursive nature of learning, one student bluntly stated, "If you don't talk [you] can't learn." Unfortunately, however, this interviewee felt unable to further elaborate on the statement.

Question 3 revealed that the majority of students believed that it was other students who spoke most rather than the teacher. Three respondents stated that it was the teacher, however, two of those three qualified their responses with "technically" and "probably". Of the nine responses stating that students spoke most, two named an individual and one did not name an individual but made it clear that it was one "particular individual". Two respondents named students of another gender – one male and one female. As a whole the impression was that interviewees were discussing general talk and not necessarily dialogic involvement in learning processes.

Question 4 was unequivocal in that 12/13 responses indicated friends or a sociolect synonym, with just one response stating that the boy would like to talk to "All the boys" in class,

possibly as a cultural phenomenon, but more likely as a proxy for those he was most friendly with in the class. Who students wished to speak to did not necessarily correlate with their answers to Question 6 which examined their view on who was "most helpful to talk to" – with 5/13 responses indicating that despite a preference for talking to friends it was more helpful to talk to the teacher. Two students hedged their bets by saying "either teacher or students" and "anyone", and one was specific about talking to "people with the same problems as you" meaning other students, but not necessarily friends. Other responses focussed on words to do with friendship "best friend", "bestie" whilst students in general or group work also featured. In one response a girl named one of her friends as someone to not work with, and as the interview was being held in class, this girl then interjected in a humorous way, positioning the conversation, despite being between a student and me the teacher-researcher, as friendly banter with the intended audience being as much the interviewee's friends as the interviewer.

Question 5 elicited a range of responses, the most substantial being an even split between on and off task talking. However, this estimate may be more to do with the hedging of bets we tried to avoid by having a 4-point Likert scale in the questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2018) and students opting for a safe middle ground. The only clear pattern that emerges is that it is most likely that talk is on task with the teacher and off task with other students.

For many students this lack of understanding of what was being asked in Question 7 made redundant Question 8, and on 9/13 interviews no response was recorded for this question. Of the remaining 4 responses 1/4 was "Don't know" and 2/4 were answers I would conclude were incorrect: "Dialogue is writing," and "Dialogue is more quotes." The remaining

response, enigmatically, “Talking: what you want. Dialogue: fixed,” is tantalizing to the researcher, particularly as the interviewee did not elaborate further, even after prompting.

Questions 9 and 10 shifted the focus to the use of written scaffolding. Question 9 on how students used the scaffolding was almost universally positive in that students said that they used them for their intended purpose, however we must consider the power imbalances at play in the interview where students seemed to perceive the scaffolding as something official from the school, often due to the centralised nature of assessment essays in particular and indeed as part of the task as much as help offered by the teacher, and as such probably the narrative that the student perceives that the school and teacher-researcher wants to hear. The ubiquitous use of written scaffolding in English and essay-based humanities subjects may have conditioned students to their use, despite initial survey results, see above, where 12/19 students disagreed that they “needed scaffolding … to write well”. Moreover, whilst the quantitative data suggests that students write more and write better quality responses after dialogic examination of written scaffolding, most of the students indicated that they 8/13 definitely wanted to start writing without “talk[ing] about these structures”, 1/13 “sometimes… just want to get started”. One student claimed to not know. 2 students qualified their positive response to the question with either “sometimes” or “spend time on it, but not too much”. Only one student was unequivocal about wanting to talk about the structures before writing “probably to the teacher”.

Discussion

There is a seeming disconnect between the quantitative and qualitative results which will be addressed by discussion on the discourses that students perceive themselves to be in in the classroom.

Before celebrating a successful ‘what works’ intervention, educators should perhaps consider the social justice implications of any changes to their normal practice. The EEF and proponents of neo-traditional teaching ideologies adopt a standpoint that best practice and the academic progress it brings will benefit most those students who might otherwise fall behind, for example those who are categorized as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, SEND, those who are eligible for the Pupil Premium, PP, and those for whom English is an Additional Language, EAL. If an intervention works, but not for the potentially more educationally vulnerable, can there be a moral justification for it? If it especially benefits these students then it, in however minute a way, can be seen as a lever of social equality. First we will discuss the results of the intervention in regards to these categories.

Quantitative Discussion SEND

Time spent writing was not the determining factor in how much writing was produced, with the possible exception of one student, not categorised as having Special Educational Needs, who wrote more in the initial task than anyone else did for any other task. It is possible that this is an outlier, or the causation may have been motivational. The steady increase in mean word count, despite the apparent time constraints imposed in the final task of the intervention would suggest that intellectual preparation for the written task increases the amount of writing as opposed to simply having more time.

Whether that holds true for those students who would be entitled to additional time in formal examinations on account of Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) is unclear as these exam access arrangements had not been finalised for a Year 9 class. However, three of the four students categorised as SEND wrote substantially more in the final task than in the first task. The one student who did not write more wrote a similar amount across the three

tasks. This approach would not then seem to adversely affect the amount students with SEND wrote, and if extra time access arrangements were in place it may have benefited all of them in this measure.

Students categorised as SEND increased their mean word count from 114 for Task 1, to 129 for Task 2, and finally to 210 for Task 3. This is more than for those not categorised with SEND, but the small number of students makes wider generalisation problematic. However, this approach does not seem to have adverse effects on the performance of SEND students, and tentatively suggests the opposite, that it is broadly beneficial for students categorised as SEND.

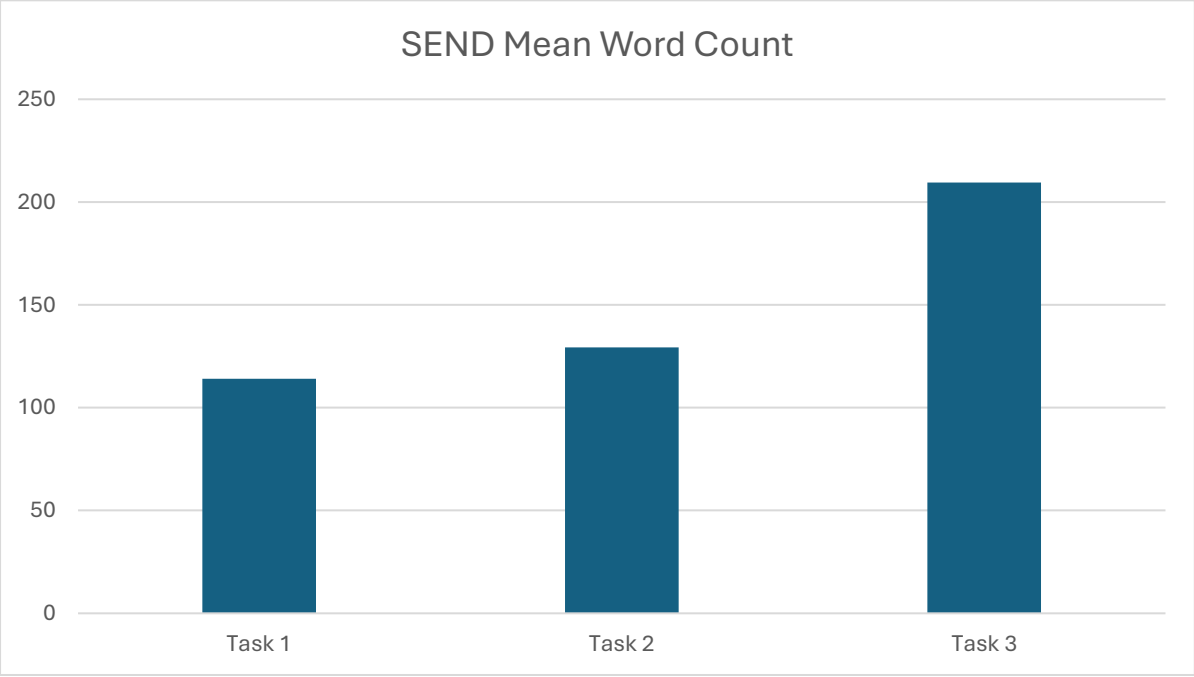


Figure 8: SEND Mean Word Count

The subjective mean grade increased more substantially for all students than the mean word count, although this is a less reliable measure. However, the increase in the mean GCSE mark is more pronounced for all students than the mean word count. Amongst those

categorised as SEND it increased significantly from Task 1, 5.5 marks, to Task 3, 9.75 marks, but in fact dipped in Task 2, 5.25. This would suggest that merely giving SEND students written scaffolding does not increase their performance, but that dialogic examination of the scaffolding does increase the quality of their responses.

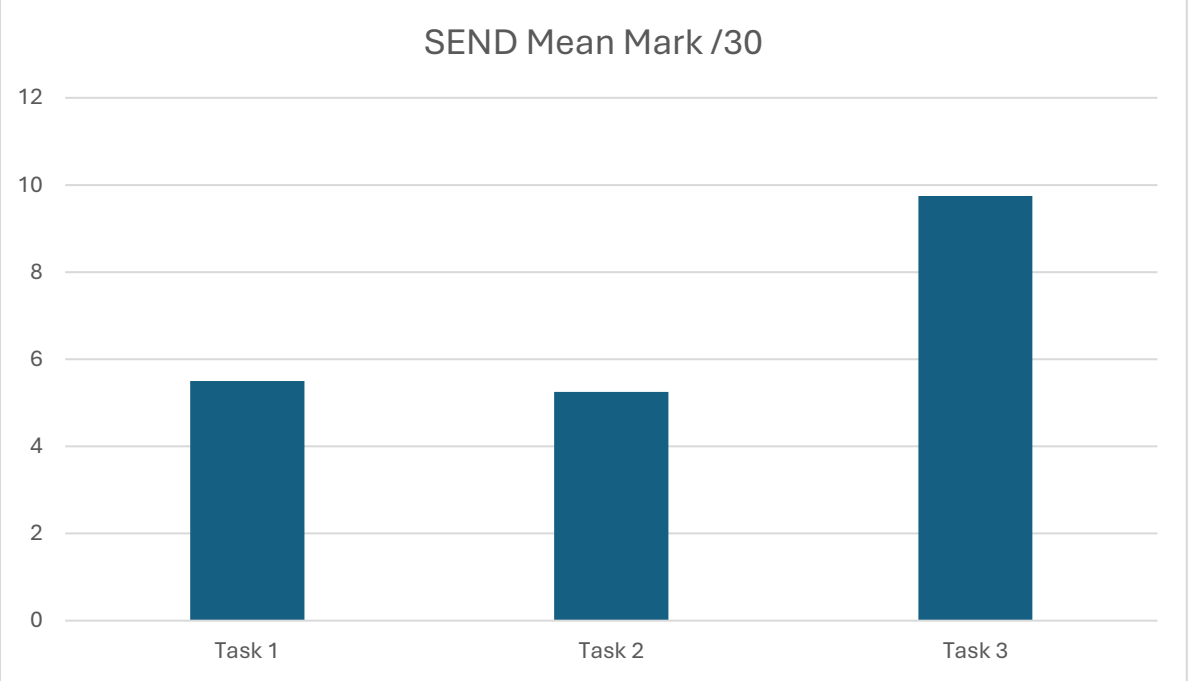


Figure 9: SEND Mean GCSE Mark

It would be reasonable to conclude that for these particular students categorised as SEND, the intervention was successful in improving both the quantity and quality of their written responses. What is not clear from this quantitative data is the mechanism whereby it occurred. At this point it might have been useful to have analysed the types of classroom interactions the individual SEND students had, and the number of them relative to other students in the classroom. Essentially, were they able to make this 'progress' with or without active contributions to classroom dialogue, or was simply being part of this community of

practice enough to drive it? This has implications for inclusive school practices (Greany, Pennacchia, Graham & Bernardes, 2023) and types of in-school provision for students categorised with SEND that go beyond the scope of this investigation. However, if it was found that simply being in the classroom as part of a community of practice, without the need to speak up or out, was a driver of progress for these students then it should have ramifications for school policy.

Quantitative Discussion Pupil Premium

Since the coalition government of 2010-2015 the Pupil Premium award has been seen as a. a proxy for disadvantage and b. a metric for measuring school performance. In this class there are four students eligible for the Pupil Premium and there is no overlap between Pupil Premium students and those categorised as having Special Educational Needs or Disability. Of those, one was absent for Task 1 and Task 3, so without any way in which to compare their results I have discounted this student for this specific Pupil Premium analysis. Of the remaining three students, two wrote less in Task 3 - one a lot less, one marginally less – and one steadily wrote more from Task 1 to Task 2 to Task 3. However, the mean word counts rise from Task 1: 108, to Task 2: 233, and finally Task 3: 230. Although the rise from Task 2 to Task 3 is not as proportionately large as that in the class as a whole, the Pupil Premium students' mean word counts were significantly higher than those of the class in general for Tasks 2: 223 compared to 134, and 3: 230 compared to 165, from a starting point of being slightly below the class average in Task 1: 108 words compared to 113. A note of caution must be sounded as to extrapolating too widely from a sample of just three students. However, it appears that having written scaffolding available disproportionately increases the amount of writing students eligible for the Pupil Premium do compared to the class in general.

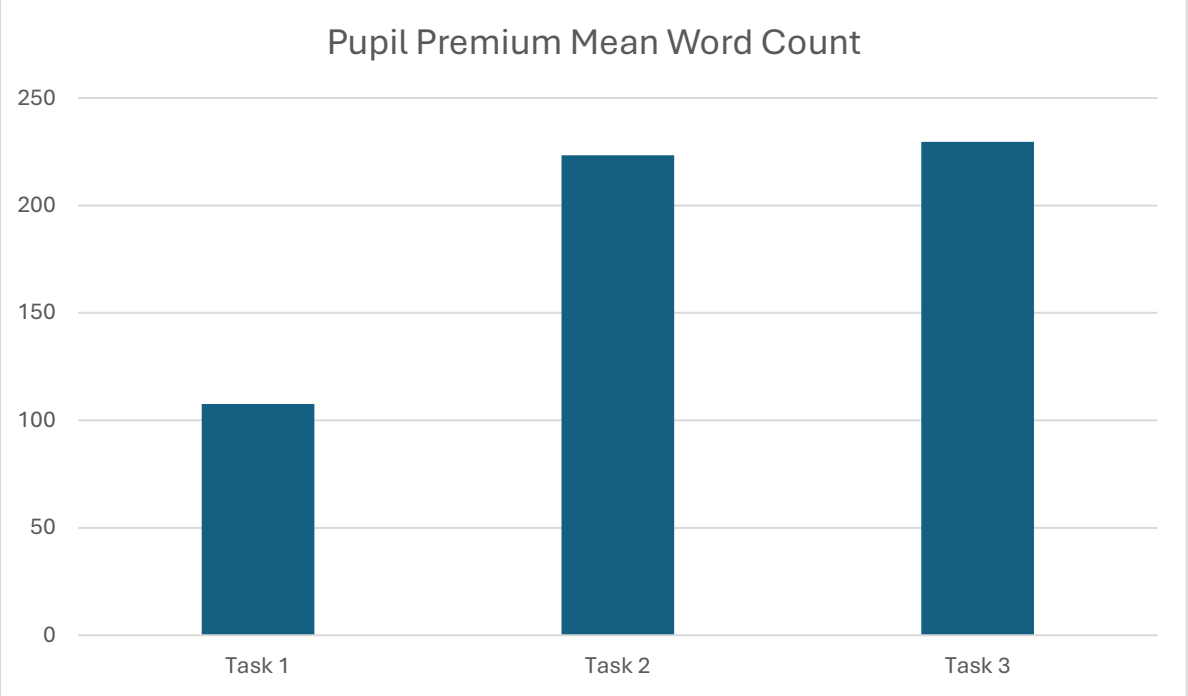


Figure 10: Pupil Premium Mean Word Count

The more subjective mean grade for the students eligible for the Pupil Premium rose from Task 1: 5.67 to Task 2: 7.67 and then Task 3: 10.67. In this instance the Pupil Premium students had consistently outperformed their more advantaged peers. On the surface this would seem to buck the trend regarding the progress of disadvantaged pupils, wherein disadvantaged pupils at the school have a most recent GCSE Progress 8 score of -0.61 against the whole cohort Progress 8 figure of -0.14. English classes in Year 9 are set by perceived ability of the students as ascertained by the staff, so I would suggest that perhaps this anomaly may be because students eligible for the Pupil Premium are routinely being placed in lower sets on average than their more advantaged peers. This is a perception based on my personal experience and professional judgment as a long-serving staff member at the school with specific responsibilities for the progress of disadvantaged students. For the purposes of this investigation, I did not collect quantitative data regarding this perception. Disregarding

the starting point, it is apparent that both providing written scaffolding and dedicating class time to the dialogic examination of it improves grades on average for students eligible for the Pupil Premium, disproportionately to their more advantaged peers. One student wrote substantially less in Task 3 than is Task 2 but was only one mark below their Task 2 score in that task. Again, the impact exam access arrangements such as extra time may have had for this student has deliberately been excluded from the intervention.

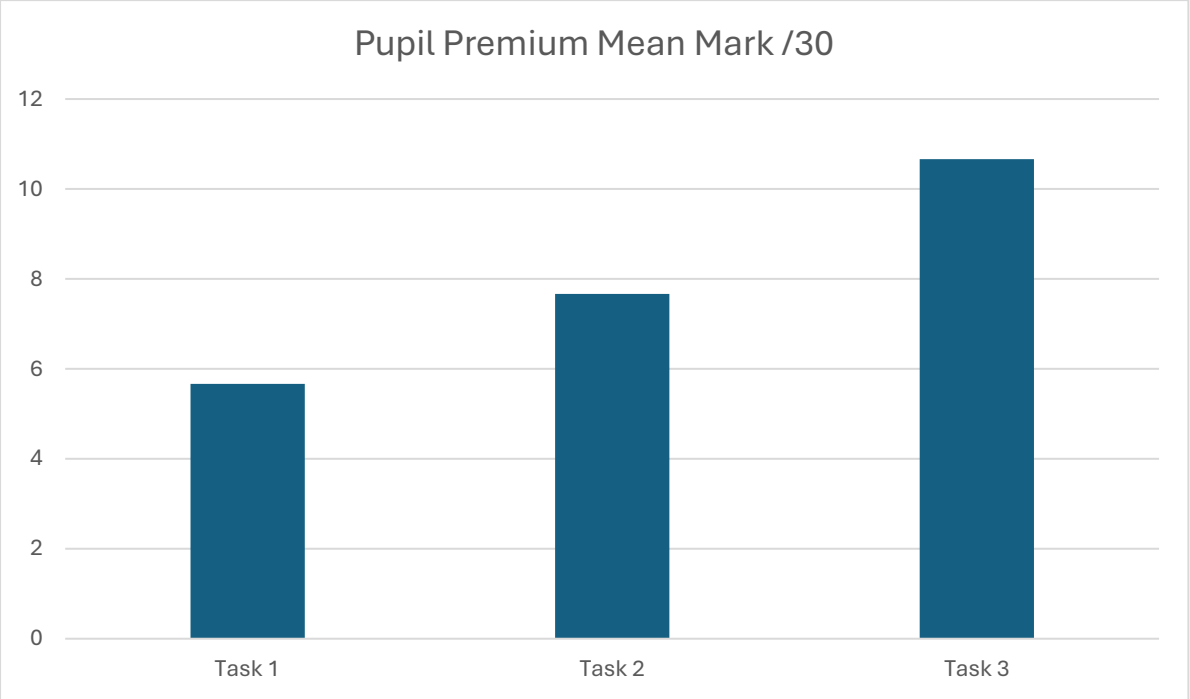


Figure 11: Pupil Premium Mean GCSE Mark

EAL

Chalmers (2022, p. 13) has outlined the scope and variety of English as an Additional Language learners in English classrooms. It is also noted that "The research on EAL, … is somewhat limited." Moreover, EAL encompasses a range of competencies in English, ranging from someone who has a parent whose first language is one other than English, but

who conducts almost all of their social and educational conversations in English, to a learner who has very recently arrived in the UK with minimal proficiency in English. Moreover, identification of EAL is patchy (Chalmers, Faitaki, & Murphy, 2023). Two of the three students designated on school records as EAL only completed one out of the three tasks. From knowledge of the students, at least one student who is not designated as EAL primarily speaks a language other than English at home, they also had not completed all three tasks. For this reason, I have decided that the analysis of students in the study designated as EAL as a separate group would not be beneficial.

Summary

In summary, it is likely that this type of intervention will disproportionately benefit those students who might otherwise be academically vulnerable. For students in receipt of the Pupil Premium written scaffolding appeared to make the most difference, however for those students categorized as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities the inclusion of dialogic teaching was essential for progress.

Discussion on Surveys and Interviews

There seems to be a disconnect between the putative success of the intervention and the students' attitudes towards written scaffolding and dialogue in the classroom. Whilst students remained consistent that they thought that talking was more important than writing, it could well be that the discourse they believed they were having was about being allowed or not be allowed to talk whilst working. Although the questionnaire was designed to gain an insight into students' attitudes towards dialogic repertoires, it could be that they interpreted it as a student voice exercise and were attempting to assert agency over classroom practice. Indeed, on one occasion when I explained that all of the written elements of the intervention were to be done in silence, one student angrily asked what the point of me asking them to do a

questionnaire if I was not going to listen to what they said in it. It also became apparent that students did not understand the word “dialogue” in the same way that I did.

One of the semi-structured interview questions [Appendix 2] was put in on the suggestion on one of my collaborators who rightly guessed that student interpretation of the term would differ from mine. Therefore, in the discourse when I am considering “talking” in the English classroom in the survey, it is a kind of accountable talk or dialogic practice (Resnick, Asterhan & Clarke, 2015, 2018) that I have in mind. However, for the students it has become about their right or otherwise to talk freely in the classroom, regardless of whether that talk is necessarily a co-construction of learning. In fact, predominantly students did not recognise the need for a more knowledgeable other to talk to, it was friends and friendship groups which were paramount. Considering the role of peers in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) microsystem this is unsurprising; however, it is subversive to linear notions of student progress that sub-optimal groupings or pairings would be chosen by students given free rein on who to talk to in the classroom. In interview students did use discourses of learning when asked to elaborate, talking about sharing ideas, and in one instance using lexis more commonly associated with the primary classroom, “magpie”. Students then are familiar with the expectation that classroom discourses should surround learning, in this case harking back to practices and discourses from the primary classroom as justification for why the student should be able to talk with their friends.

In fact, the overwhelming impression from the semi-structured interviews was that students wanted to be able to talk to their friends, and that for them, any discourse on “talk” was predicated on students trying to position me, as the teacher-researcher, into believing that

them being allowed to talk to their friends was important. In relation to this, the answers to Question 5

5. How much of talking in the classroom is about the subject knowledge and how much is about other things?

Revealed that 4 students believed that most of the talk in a classroom was subject knowledge, despite caveats that non-subject knowledge talk was “substantial” or a substantial percentage “25%” and “40%”, 4 students believed that it was more “off-task” than on task, 4 students said it was “50-50” or “half and half”. One student hedged their bets with “depends on the lesson”. Little clarity can be drawn from these responses as to what actually happens in the classroom, instead we need to consider that the children, in this instance, in front of both their teacher and their peers, are deciding which narrative discourse to engage with.

Interestingly, all four of the 50-50 respondents were part of the same female friendship group. It is possible that this therefore reflects their normal way of working when doing group work. It is also possible that are hedging their bets in a question they do not know the ‘correct’ answer to. However, I feel that the discourse chosen was more one of student voice, wherein a group of students perceived to be talkative by their peers – as indicated in responses to Question 3

3. Who talks most in the classroom?

were trying to defend and promote their preferences for classroom interactions. All four respondents spoke positively about sharing “ideas” in their answers to Question 2.

2. Do you think that ‘talking’ is valuable in helping you learn?

Additionally, one of the group explicitly stated that it is possible to "separate work and talking" and another was the student mentioned earlier who become irked by not being allowed to talk to their friends after in the initial questionnaire they had expressed a preference for this. There were no other correlations between answers that were as strong. The idea of a student wishing the teacher-researcher to see the potential "separat[ing] work and talking" as either a substantial mitigation or possibly a positive could be problematic for a researcher with a positionality of expecting dialogic teaching repertoires (Alexander, 2020) to be effective and that language is the primary driver of learning (Bruner, 1975, Vygotsky, 1987).

Students in interview were broadly positive about, or at least compliant with, the use of written scaffolds. 10/13 students were unequivocal about their utility and that the students themselves used them as intended. Of the three remaining students, one was "not sure" and unable or unwilling to elaborate further. This student was also one of the students categorized as SEND, and probably the student in the class who receives the most help from adults (teaching assistant or teacher) to complete their work, and is likely to be more reliant on spoken interactions in order to do so. Another suggested that it "depends on the subject". The final student said that they "just put it in the book", which was suggestive of them being compliant to the wishes of the teacher, but not seeing much value to them. At this point the students had received their results and teacher feedback, and objectively knew that both the written scaffolding and subsequently the talking about them – the dialogic examination of them had increased both the mean word counts and the mean marks out of thirty. On average the students would have seen their own results improved. Both in interview and in the questionnaire there was a shift in attitudes regarding the use of writing frames, but no shift in attitudes towards the dialogic examination of them before writing.

The semi-structured interviews revealed student discourses and narratives surrounding the use of talk that were not aligned with the research focus of dialogue as a medium of instruction. For students the discourses were those that surrounded the level of policing of the soundscape in schools and those of friendship groupings. The narratives the most students wanted to centre were those in which they were allowed to talk, particularly with friends or near peers such as “the boys”, and that how much of that talk was about the work should be negotiable so long as the work gets done. These premises firmly place the completion of work and learning itself as something that is evidenced in writing. Whilst this does not explain the assertions in the Question 1 questionnaire responses that “Talking is more important than writing”, if we take those responses as move to try and assert agency in a discourse surrounding the soundscape of the classroom, then it makes sense. Students in this context are more used to student voice exercises than educational research. There is no logical discrepancy between trying to assert that talking is important and that that talk does not have to be centred on the learning so long as the work gets done when seen from the perspective of the student in Year 9 whose primary concerns are immediate and social, rather than focusing on putative exam success over two years away.

Quantitatively, the combination of written scaffolding, or perhaps a more accurate description would be writing frames, combined with dialogic exploration of the same, was the most effective method of instruction. However, student attitudes towards the dialogic aspects of the intervention were not changed by the demonstration of this effectiveness. The same did not hold true for the use of written scaffolding where student perceptions of their usefulness had changed after the intervention. There was no sense that dialogue surrounding the work or the

physical manifestations of it such as worksheets was emancipatory, rather that the freedom to talk with friends or near peers alongside completion of the written work would be.

Conclusions and Implications

For the class studied it is clear from the quantitative data generated that it is preferable to have both written scaffolding and dialogic examination of it if the aim is for students to progress in terms of the quantity of work and the subjective, criteria-referenced, quality of work produced. It is equally clear from the qualitative data generated, that students in the class studied prioritised other discourses and narratives surrounding talk in the classroom.

What is the relationship between classroom time given to dialogue about written scaffolding and students' written outcomes?

In simple terms a reduction in time allocated to writing in a lesson did not adversely affect the amount of writing generated. The premise is that the time given to dialogue at least compensated for the time lost by enabling students to more readily organise and structure their writing through the cognitive and linguistic preparation afforded by dialogue. No analysis was done as to the rate that students wrote, however, the mean word count data generated shows that on average students wrote more in a shorter time period when dialogically prepared for writing beforehand. It is also clear that the presence of written scaffolding increased mean word counts in a time period equal to when the task was given without any written scaffolding, particularly for students eligible for the Pupil Premium used as a proxy for socio-economic disadvantage. What is significant about the task with the dialogic component is that more was written in less time. This would suggest that dialogue is an effective use of lesson time. The caveat is that in this research project the nature of the interactions were not observed or codified and it relies on the assumption that the teacher-researcher is a professional who is aware of and skilled at using dialogic techniques. As with any intervention, implementation is key (Sharples, Albers, Fraser & Kime, 2019).

It is slightly more complex when judgements about the quality of the written work is considered. Again, there is a reliance on the professional judgement (Muller & Cook, 2024) of the teacher-researcher and the mitigations put in place to minimise bias. If we take the marking as at least consistent if not necessarily accurate to a future examination, then we can judge that both giving students written scaffolding and dialogic examination of that scaffolding each increase the quality of the responses based on a criteria referenced mark scheme. Both of these interventions could be categorised as 'what works'. However, there was little difference between the marks for SEND categorised students when they had written scaffolding and when they did not, in fact there was a slight reduction in quality. Therefore, for this small cohort of students, written scaffolding on its own is not 'what works'. From an inclusion perspective however, it would not seem ethical to concentrate solely on written scaffolding and expecting students to independently access them. The most significant difference for this small group of students categorised as SEND would seem to be the dialogue prior to the writing. The rise in popularity of Lemov's ideas (2021, ps. 327-338) may lead to practitioners opting to or being expected to as part of school policy enact some or all of the techniques in 'Teach Like a Champion'. In particular techniques 39 'Silent Solo' and 40 'Front the Writing' without dialogic input may not be effective for students categorised as SEND and risk them falling behind their peers. However, SEND categorisation is broad and uneven and to extrapolate too widely from such a small sample remains problematic.

It would seem that a combination of written scaffolding, or perhaps more accurately writing frames, together with dialogic examination of the same in a purposeful classroom discourse could produce a truer Brunerian scaffold to enable all students to progress if lesson time is given over to dialogic practices with appropriate and skilled calibration. This should benefit almost all students if not all and be an effective use of lesson time. The clear implications of

this are that teachers should be both proficient in dialogic repertoires and give lesson time to using them.

How effective are written scaffolding structures with and without prior discussion?

Both written scaffolding structures and dialogic examination of them were shown quantitatively to be effective in the research at increasing the amount of writing and subjectively the quality of the written responses. Written scaffolding on its own was shown to be effective in most cases in increasing the amount of writing students produced, and similarly, in most cases, in increasing the subjective quality of the writing. A caveat here is that this did not hold true for the small number of students categorised as SEND, and, although in absolute terms they are a small number, 4, the study itself was also of a small number, 19, and those students categorised as SEND represent 21% of the cohort. Whilst written scaffolding on its own is valuable for most students, if the results of this study are transferable it would let down some of the most in need students if it was not paired with classroom dialogue.

The combination of written scaffolding and dialogic examination of it prior to writing was shown to be most effective in ensuring both higher mean word counts and the more subjective higher meant marks despite less time being available for students to write in. Crucially this held true for the students as a whole class, those students eligible for the Pupil Premium and those students categorised as SEND.

What are students' perceptions of the efficacy of written scaffolding and classroom dialogue in preparation for crafting written responses?

Students seem to accept that written scaffolding or writing frames are part of the normal praxis of writing in the classroom. In discourses about them they are seen as part of the work in itself, and something that they are expected to use. Initially, students were ambivalent about the need for them, however, after their efficacy was demonstrated in the intervention the attitude of the class towards them shifted. It is possible that school-imposed narratives about being independent in their learning prior to the intervention influenced attitudes initially, subsequently changing once the practicalities of writing a particular task were experienced.

However, students' attitudes towards the use of dialogic techniques surrounding the written scaffolds did not substantively change and there was no sense that dialogue surrounding learning was in any sense emancipatory. It appears that for these particular students at least this emancipation through dialogue is a narrative that is imposed on a pedagogical repertoire of techniques by adults with particular ideological purposes.

Implications for Practice

Returning to the 'what works' perspective that initiated my research it seems that the commonly used writing frames in secondary English classrooms have their uses and can help students -particularly disadvantaged ones – to progress. However, they are perhaps not true scaffolds as they lack the required calibration to be so, although no doubt they will continue to be called 'scaffolding' in the ecolects of English department staffrooms. With this in mind, it is perhaps pertinent to bear in mind that these structures are *ersatz* scaffolding and that any adaptation of them to meet the needs of the learners should be encouraged. These frames

should be adapted to suit the needs of the learners rather than teaching the learners to follow the frames. In my Teaching and Learning role as a Lead Practitioner I will encourage the use of such written scaffolding with the proviso that they should be viewed by students and teachers as dynamic aids to learning and crafting writing rather than a series of steps that constitute the learning in of itself.

From the literature and from my own experience I firmly believe that dialogic repertoires, particularly in English Literature, are a good bet when trying to plan what will work to enable students to progress. The focal point of the quantitative element of this research showed that apportioning class time to dialogue did not reduce the amount students wrote in class, in fact on average, it increased both the amount of written work and the subjective quality of that work. This has clear implications when considering lesson planning; efficiency of classroom practice, including maximising time, is a hallmark of neo-traditional pedagogical ideologies: in order for dialogic practices to survive in this potentially hostile environment, they need to show quantifiably that they work – that they are efficient. Ultimately, and very much in retrospect, this is why as a teacher-researcher I chose to structure the intervention in this way, with the subconscious positionality that wanted it to prove successful, for it to be 'what works'.

Implications for Research

It seems that further research into the link between dialogic repertoires and student progress at secondary, particularly in relation to high-stakes formal assessment such as GCSE examinations would be desirable. Schools and practitioners who would be willing to experiment with these classes given the accountability pressures schools and, in some cases, individual teachers are under might not be as easy to recruit, particularly for the control groups of RCT studies. However, practitioner research and action research by teacher-

researchers into quantifiable outcomes, such as word counts and GCSE-criteria-referenced marks, could prove useful in calibrating how much time in lesson should be given to dialogue. It is likely that this will vary according to context and therefore may be better envisaged as cycles of action research than as a large-scale RCT.

Moreover, there is an implication in ideas of scaffolding that it is desirable for the training wheels to eventually come off and that any scaffolding should be gradually removed from students as they approach assessment points. Theoretically this idea is commonplace (Gibbons 2017, 2019), however, again, it may be fruitful for contextualised practitioner or action research to ascertain whether this is what in fact routinely happens in English classrooms, and where it does, is it more effective than leaving 'scaffolding', written or otherwise, in place.

Research 'in press'

Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson was one of the main academic contributors to the Oracy APPG and has research (with Kelly, Moorghen, and Simon-Caffyn) in press on 'What is the relationship between oracy, confidence and outcomes for teachers and students?' This research should go some way to understanding the link between oracy and student outcomes, even if this may not be specifically a study of dialogic repertoires, an earlier study (Holmes-Henderson & Wright 2023) references both the work of Robin Alexander and Neil Mercer (Canal Barnaby 2020) so it would seem that the research would encompass some elements of dialogic teaching. It is likely that the research will shed further light on the links between dialogic techniques and quantifiable outcomes for students. It is less likely to be deliberately focused on written scaffolding combined with dialogic techniques but may nevertheless give insight into oracy embedded within common teaching praxis, which is likely to include written scaffolds.

Conclusion

Ultimately it seems unlikely that the writing frames commonly referred to as ‘scaffolds’ in English departments in England’s secondary schools will disappear from whence they mysteriously came. Nor, in my opinion based on this small-scale research, should they. They do not however qualify as true scaffolding in the Brunerian (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) sense and will function most effectively only if they are calibrated and mediated through deliberate dialogue. Time and effort should be given over to this in class and if it is, it will be time well spent.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Questionnaire and Answers

Talking about Writing – Initial Results in Brackets

For each statement circle one box which most closely shows how you feel about it.

a. Writing is more important than talking in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0 (0)	7(7)	6 (5)	4 (5)

b. Talking is more important than writing in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4 (5)	8 (5)	4 (6)	1 (1)

c. I like to talk about written work before writing it.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3 (2)	9 (11)	4 (4)	1 (0)

d. I like to start writing straight away when given a written task.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2 (3)	4 (4)	8 (9)	3 (1)

e. I prefer to talk to the teacher about my work than other students.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0 (2)	3 (3)	11 (6)	3 (6)

f. I prefer to talk to other students about my work than the teacher.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3 (8)	10 (7)	3 (2)	1 (0)

g. I need scaffolding such as writing frames or sentence starters to write well.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 (0)	8 (5)	6 (11)	2 (1)

h. I prefer to not use scaffolding such as writing frames when writing in English.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 (2)	6 (9)	7 (6)	3 (0)

i. I prefer to talk about the scaffolding with my teacher before beginning to write.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0 (1)	8 (7)	7 (8)	2 (1)

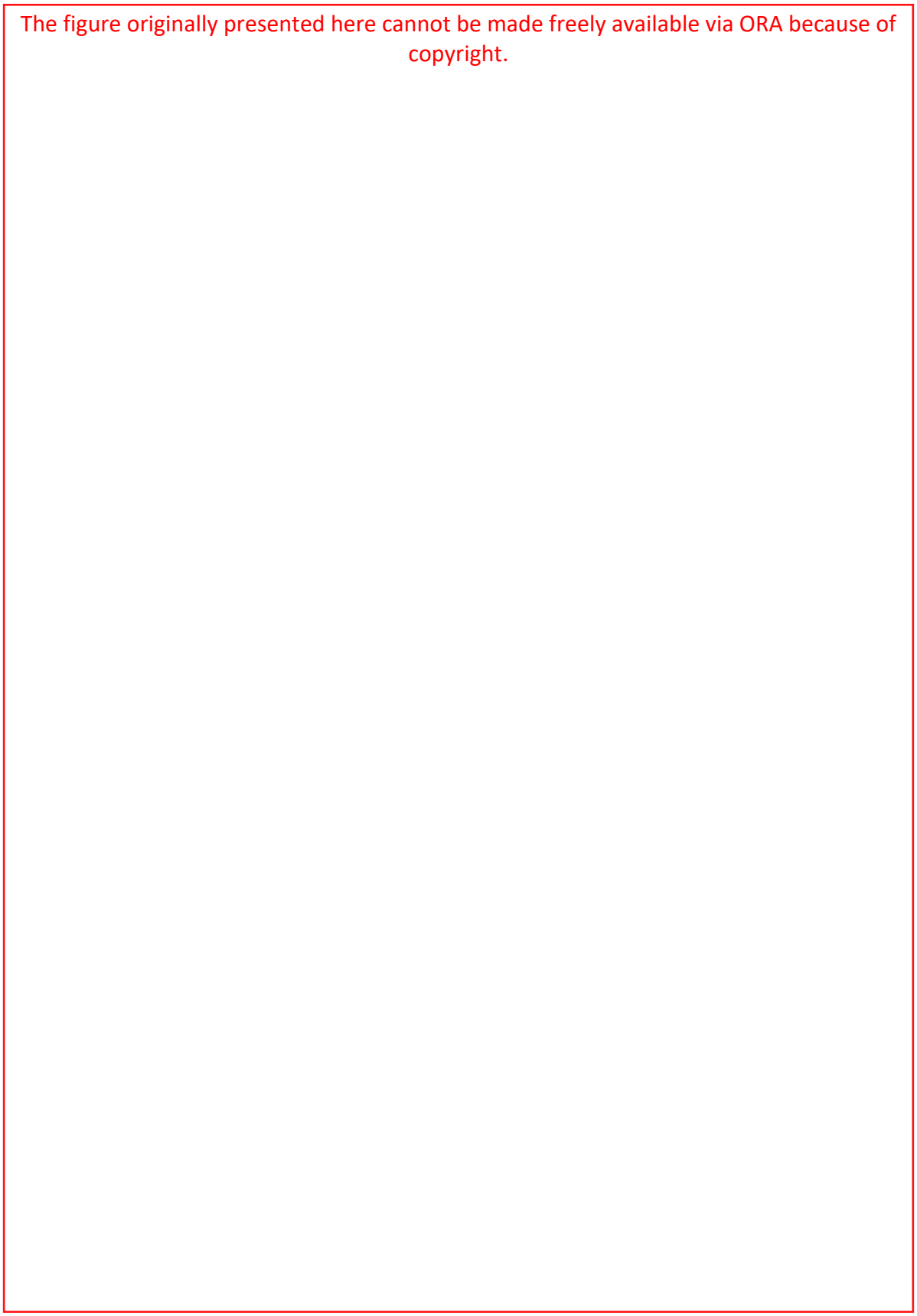
j. I prefer to start writing using the scaffolding without talking about it.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 (1)	10 (10)	3 (5)	2 (1)

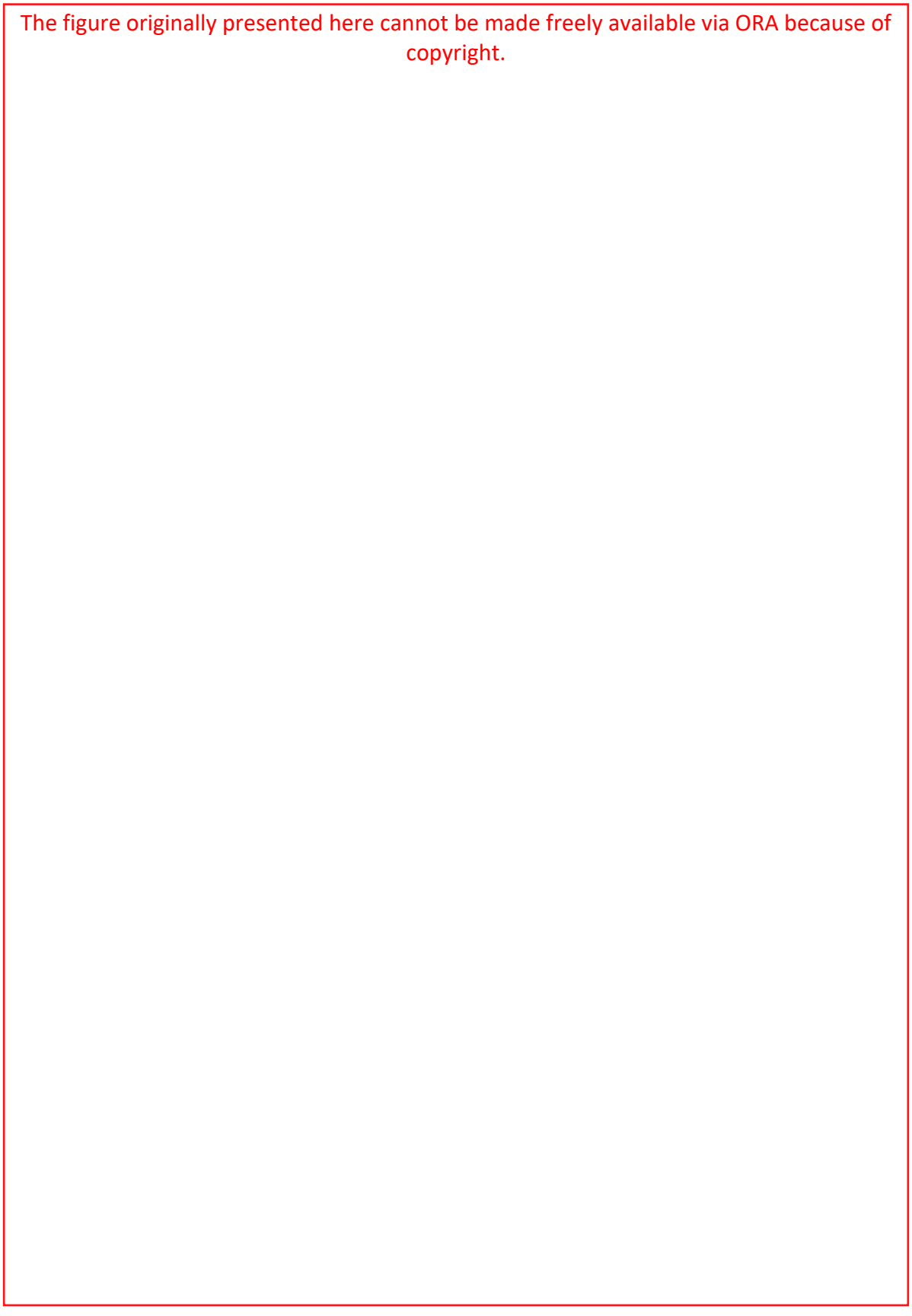
k. I like to talk about my work with one partner.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2 (3)	7 (7)	6 (7)	2 (0)

l. I like to talk about my work in a small group.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7 (2)	4 (8)	5 (7)	1 (0)

m. I do not like to talk about my work with other students.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 (1)	6 (3)	6 (7)	4 (6)

Appendix B – extracts

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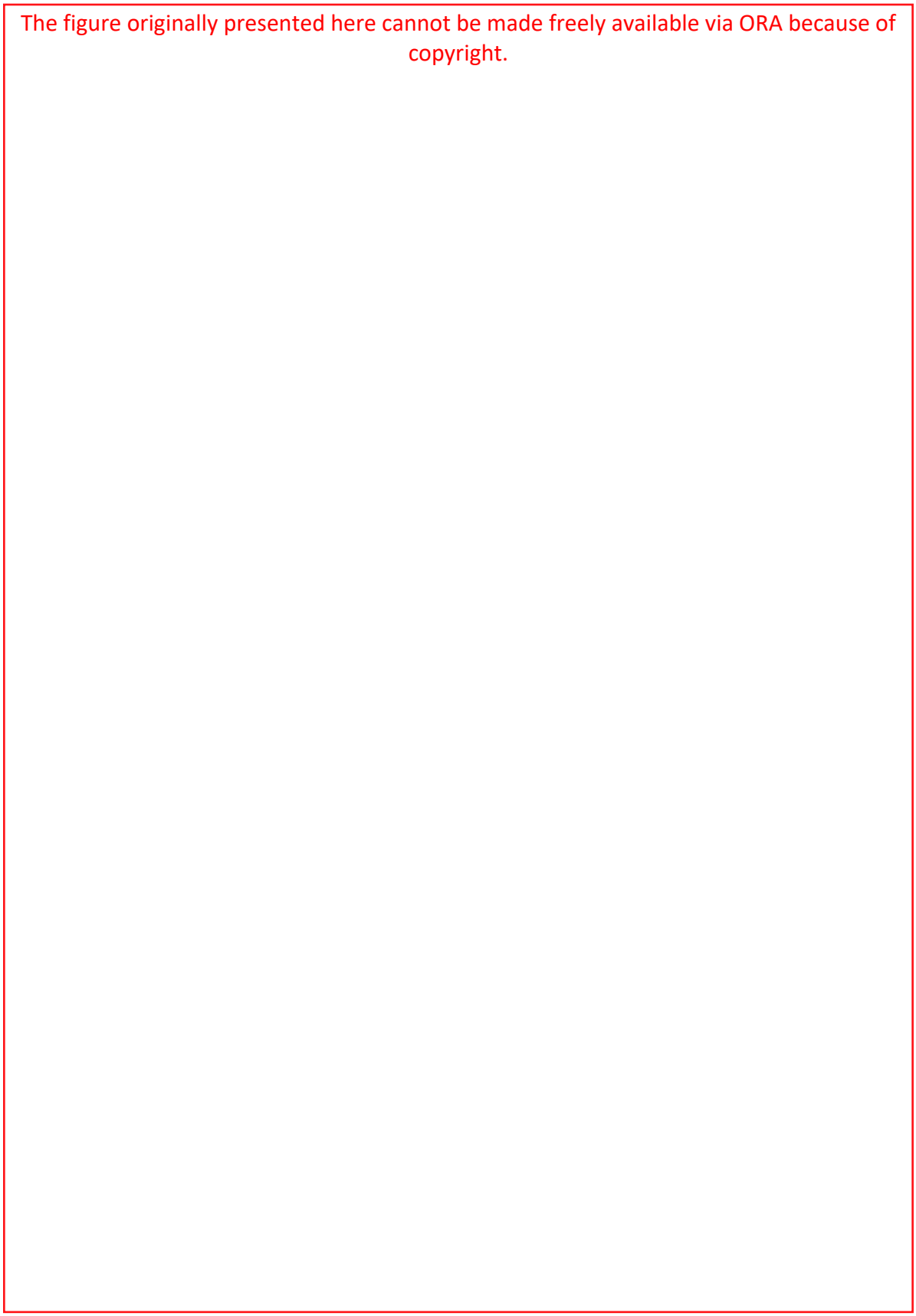
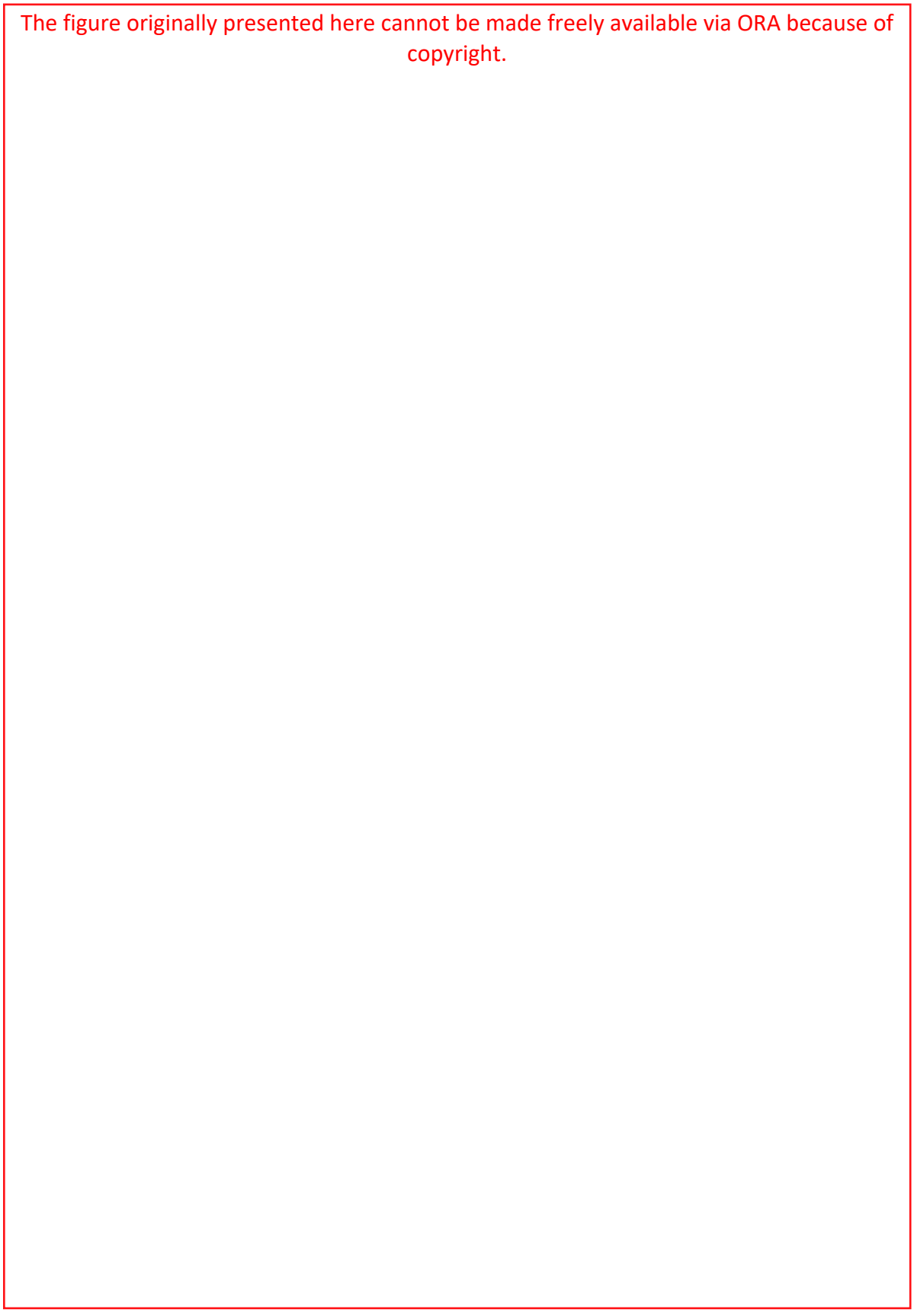
Appendix C – written scaffolding

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Appendix D – semi-structured interview questions