

How does the use of explicit 'talk for learning teaching' improve students' collaboration, understanding and independence in English lessons?

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How does the use of explicit 'talk for learning teaching' improve students' collaboration, understanding and independence in English lessons?

CONTENTS

Abstract	5
Introduction.....	6
The aim	6
The context.....	7
Why look at talk for learning in this context?	8
What is talk for learning and what do I mean by it?	10
Why do we need talk for learning?	11
Why do we need talk for learning at my school?	14
Literature Review	16
What are the features of talk for learning (what does it look like?)	16
Talk in the Classroom.....	18
Talk in the English Classroom.....	20
Collaboration not cooperation	23
The role of the teacher	23
Explicit Teaching	27
Non-intervention	30
Independence.....	31
Pupil to pupil talk.....	32
Pre-conditions	34
Cultural and Multi-lingual contexts	36
The effects of talk for learning techniques	37
Methodology	42
Participants.....	45
Discussion Groups	45
Observations.....	46
Teachers' Research journals	47
The format of the lessons	47
Collaboration	48

Ethical Considerations	49
Findings	50
Pre-intervention focus group discussion	50
Pupil Perceptions of talk in lessons.....	52
Research Journals and observations.....	53
Putting words in their mouths	55
The presence of the teacher	57
Task design/ the role of reflection	58
Focus group discussions	59
Discussion.....	60
RQ1 Can talk for learning be explicitly taught?	64
RQ2 Does the teaching of talk for learning improve the quality of collaborative group work?	65
RQ3 What are teachers' perceptions of the value of talk for learning?	66
RQ4 Can the teaching of explicit talk for learning collaboration improve student independence and understanding?	67
VALIDITY/ limitations.....	68
Conclusions.....	70
References.....	72
Appendices	79
Appendix 1 Sample minutes of meetings with teacher participants	80
Appendix 2 Questions to guide student interviews	81
Appendix 3 Samples of teacher participants' field notes.....	82
Appendix 4 Example Research journal sent to teacher participants.....	85
Appendix 5 Example talk rules and instructions	86
Appendix 6 Sample Class rules for intervention groups	87

Abstract

Talk plays a crucial role in the classroom from teacher discourse (Tolmie et al. 2010, Mercer, 2008) to pupils' social exchanges (Levine, Resnick and Higgins, 1993; Alexander, 2004; Mercer and Dawes, 2014; Gillies, 2014). The benefits for effective collaborative dialogue include intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, independence, internalisation of problem solving methods and a way of learning that uses discovery and peer interaction and questioning rather than monologic teacher talk and whole class pedagogies. After reviewing a range of research from the UK and internationally that sets out the importance of talk including leading research from Mercer (2000) and Alexander (2004), an English Department in an International School undertook practitioner research, drawing on these researchers' ideas and publications. The aim was to ascertain whether explicitly taught talk for learning techniques would improve understanding and independence in the 10-16 age range. The indications were that by raising the importance of talk, building opportunities into planning and working together as a Department towards a common goal, the quality of talk in the classroom improved. Additionally, greater opportunities for EAL and SEN learners were created and teachers developed professionally within the school context.

Introduction

The aim

Talk in schools varies widely from social chat to specific teaching frameworks such as *Talk for Writing* (Corbett and Strong, 2011). The primacy of talk (Edwards and Westgate, 1994) has grown in prominence and there is now a large body of literature looking at the many benefits including linguistic acquisition, cognitive development and social benefits. National Frameworks and projects such as the National Oracy Project (Norman, 1992; Alexander, 2012) have targeted talk sporadically over the last 30 years and due to its political association (Alexander, 2012) it could be argued it is currently out of favour by government but not by researchers and teachers. The aim of this research was to investigate whether talk in the classroom could be improved and focused through explicit teaching of talk for learning techniques and how this impacted students' ability to work more independently and to further their own learning during English lessons.

The vast majority of research in talk for learning follows a social-constructivist approach. In keeping with this tradition and, due to its natural affinity with talk pedagogies, a social-constructivist approach was taken and collaborative methods were used to engage a whole English Department in an International School. To address noticeable deficits and inconsistencies in pupil talk, the aim was to deliver and experiment with methods to target language use in class. The Department wanted to look specifically at how talk for learning approaches, particularly in relation to Mercer's *Interthinking* (2008) and Alexander's (2004) *Dialogic* approaches, would improve the quality of talk in the classroom. The study sought to address the following research questions:

- Can talk for learning be explicitly taught?

- Does the teaching of talk for learning improve the quality of collaborative group work?
- What are teachers' perceptions of the value of talk for learning?
- Can the teaching of explicit talk for learning collaboration improve student independence and understanding?

The context

The research conducted was part of an English Department's Development plan in the second year of start-up of a British Curriculum International School. The school was governed by its UK sister school stakeholders as well as the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) and the investors (a development company in the UAE). At the time of writing, the school was made up of the following:

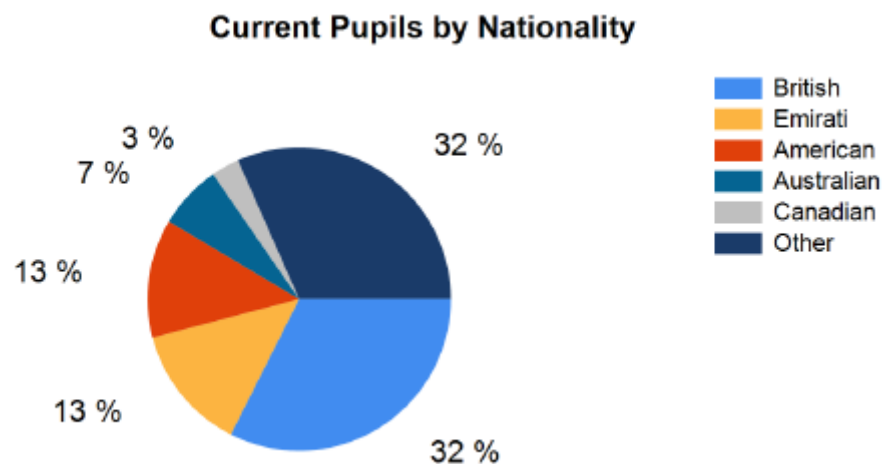


Figure 1 Current Pupils by Nationality

It was a through school from age 4-16 and the medium of instruction was English. The school was not highly selective although there was an English language requirement. Students sat INCAS and MIDYIS as part of their admissions but it is against ADEC policy to be academically selective although parameters were set by the school if not always adhered to.

The Department was made up of eight full time members of staff. Two British primary teachers began with the researcher in year one of the start-up, and the following teachers joined in year two: two secondary English teachers from the UK, one British English specialist from another school in the UAE, one prep school teacher from the UK and one secondary teacher with no experience of the UK curriculum.

Why look at talk for learning in this context?

There were many factors that prompted this research which all stemmed from the difficulties of setting up a new British curriculum international school modelled on a high performing independent sister school in the UK. Issues around pupil admission selection and subsequent setting had begun to impact on the teaching and learning. A dichotomy was emerging between wishing to deliver a highly academic curriculum similar to that of a UK independent school and the pedagogical demands of teaching enormous range of abilities of students accepted at admission. Teachers had also noted that the talk in the classroom, whilst the pupils were confident and social, was not used to further learning and often talk was off task or lacking in technical and advanced vocabulary. In addition, due to the international nature of the cohort, there were a large number of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). There was also a lack of specialist in class support to cope with the numbers nor enough opportunity to provide specialist teachers to target individuals or groups of EAL students. As Head of Department (HOD), I decided that peer modelling would be more productive than a bottom set made up entirely of EAL and Special Educational Needs (SEN) students; all of whom would have a range of differing needs that would possibly not be able to be addressed by one teacher. Evidence was needed, however, to influence policy decisions made by the senior management team (SMT) about setting by ability and to tackle perceptions about mixed ability classrooms held by some parents, teachers and SMT.

There was also anecdotal evidence that talk was not valued as a means of learning by students and by some teachers. Student perceptions in the more able groups were that writing and individual tasks were prized more highly. Conversely, these students were very eloquent and enjoyed discussion and debate but they did not always use it to further their own learning, more as a way of grand-standing or demonstrating intellectual prowess. For the less able, those with less than two years of learning English, and those less confident in using their second language, there was a need for them to try out their language and to listen to more competent peers in order to frame their writing (such as Contazzi and Jin's (2007) narrative approaches to writing for EAL learners). Talk for learning was also needed to help these students to order their sentences grammatically when speaking formally and informally in a range of contexts (Conteh, Kumar and Beddow, 2008).

Although as an independent international school and relatively free from the confines of the new National Curriculum (DfE, 2014, 2013a, 2013b), it was important to address the new NC and its move away from a dialogic, exploratory approach towards more rigid pedagogies and grammar and fact based learning. This was due to the primary curriculum approach favoured by the Head of Junior at start-up but also because of the basis of the curriculum being routed in UK changing practice. The UK sister school, like most senior English departments and primary schools, were wrestling with ideas about the changes in assessment after the abandonment of levels and what this meant; as well as tackling pedagogical issues raised by NC changes. In a speech about his new curriculum, the Minister for Education responsible for the new NC belittled researchers as 'so-called practitioners' (Gove, 2013). Taking a rigid stance that teaching is about direct instruction, Gove tried to convince his audience that facilitating talk and using an 'over-reliance on group work' were not valuable ways to encourage learning. As a start-up we were in a position to consider what we thought valuable ways of learning are for our students, what skills they needed and what pedagogical issues we would put at the forefront of our curriculum. There was a strong feeling that the

regressive approach of teacher led learning would not be compatible with our aims, the aims of the sister school, who had a newly appointed Head of Teaching and Learning, nor with ongoing research. The research, then, was initially child-centred but also became a means by which the Department could collaborate.

Moving from three English teachers to eight in year two and fragmenting between two buildings as the Senior School opened, it was also important to find ways for teachers to share good practise and collaborate professionally and build a coherent Department across the two phases. The project became part of this move. It also enabled opportunities for teachers to observe each other in a way that focused their thoughts on children's learning rather than judging another's lesson.

What is talk for learning and what do I mean by it?

Talk for learning is a very wide and encompassing term and the reasons for not opting to look at one particular kind of talk, such as Barnes' (Barnes and Todd, 1977) ideas about exploratory talk or Mercer's (2000) *interthinking*, were to enable teachers involved in the study to choose a range of methods and styles to fit their target group. Vygotsky (1978) claims that 'inter-mental' collaborative dialogue is important in developing 'intra-mental' internal cognitive ability (Rojas-Drummond and Mercer, 2003). Like Vygotsky, Mercer picks up on 'inter-mental' skills with his *interthinking* discourse ideas (Mercer, 2000) and with his *exploratory talk* research and interventions. *Exploratory talk* can be defined as 'a joint, co-ordinated form of co-reasoning in language, with speakers sharing knowledge, challenging ideas, evaluating evidence, and considering options in a reasoned and equitable way' (Mercer and Littleton, 2007, p62). This definition sat well with the Department aims and although I was not overly prescriptive in my collaboration with my Department, I did draw on specific areas of the talk for learning research and in particular, *interthinking*, *dialogic* and *exploratory* types of talk are at the heart of my research.

For Alexander (2004), dialogic teaching is the ability to engage in dialogue that asks questions and elicits further questions and lines of enquiry between pupils and teachers alike – it *‘harnesses the power of talk to engage children, stimulate and extend their thinking, and advance their learning and understanding’* (Alexander, 2004, p. 27). As Levine et al. (1993) point out, the situatedness of learning has an impact on what and how individuals learn and this also forms part of what talk for learning is in this study. The nature of the task, the kinds of questions asked and the people surrounding you will all have an impact on cognitive development. Levine et al. draw on the work of social psychologists to develop a theory that cognition is fundamentally social.

In their review into the development of research on talk between teachers and students, Mercer and Dawes (2014) can trace dialogic approaches dating back to at least the 1970s where they claim a number of researchers aimed for research that had:

‘At its heart the assertion that children’s learning and intellectual development will be best assisted if...they are encouraged and enabled to take an active and proportionally significant role in classroom talk. That is, dialogic teaching is that in which both teachers and pupils make substantial and significant contributions and through which pupils’ thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward’ (Mercer and Dawes, 2014, p437).

It is on the bedrock of these ideas about the value of talk that this study is built and its many benefits are what we sought for the pupils in our setting.

Why do we need talk for learning?

Dialogue and the use of language holds arguably the most important place in the classroom both in terms of the teachers’ tool for instruction but also as a tool for making meaning – it is ‘ubiquitous, flexible, creative’ and ‘intimately connected to the creation and pursuit of reasoned argument’ (Mercer and Littleton, 2007, p2). With the disappearance of ‘Speaking and Listening’ as a separate strand from the New National Curriculum (DfE, 2014) and with the emphasis at 11+ and 13+ (ISEB, 2013) on reading and writing; it is easy to see

how talk has become sidelined and undervalued in the classroom. Additionally, talk as an explicitly taught and valued tool for learning is potentially in decline due to the increasing pressures of inspection criteria and performance related pay linked to assessments. In the independent sector there is also an emphasis on academic achievement which is results measured. With creative and arts based subjects such as drama being squeezed out of the curriculum, it is increasingly difficult to find time and create opportunities for meaningful talk in the classroom. This contradicts the kind of workplace skills that employers are increasingly demanding with new approaches to professional working relationships such as open plan offices. It also contradicts Government inspection bodies in the UK (Ofsted) (2015) and the UAE (ADEC) (2012) whose inspection frameworks look at speaking and listening and collaboration in their criteria for schools. I wished, in my collaborative research, to go beyond the now disbanded Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) (2003, 2001) ideas of Speaking and Listening as a *skill* that must be developed by using talk as a way of learning and developing independent learning skills and as part of a pedagogical *process* (Barnes, 2008). Resnick, Michaels and O'Connor (2010) cite globalization, multiculturalism and diversity as three compelling reasons to build the ability to use discourse to interrogate, mediate and engage with the world. Young people will have to engage in and negotiate a brand new world of social differences and habits of communication and much tolerance, understanding and the building of relationships will depend on young people developing the skills of negotiation and deliberative discourse (Resnick et al., 2010) for philosophical, political and societal reasons.

'In an increasingly connected but diverse world, deliberation and discussion must be employed not just to communicate what people already know or believe, but also to build knowledge and craft negotiated solutions' (Resnick, 2010 p164).

The National Literacy Trust (NLT) (2015) and the Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw (Ofsted, 2012b) would agree with this. Programmes such as the Literacy Trust's *Words for Work*, *Literacy for Life* and *Oxfordshire Gaining Momentum* highlight the deficit that language skills and oracy have (NLT, 2015). In their State of the Nation report (2015), the NLT

identify employers' perceptions of the falling standards of literacy (by which they mean grammar and spelling) and oral skills. It is difficult to see this situation improving when the new NC has removed Speaking and Listening from the English curriculum and has written it as an element to underpin many subjects including English. Ofsted's *Improving Literacy Report* (2013) gives examples of campaigns that have been run in schools in an attempt to embed literacy across the curriculum and the general reluctance of teachers to embrace literacy as a shared responsibility. Sir Wilshaw, in his address to a primary school, identifies one of the major obstacles to language acquisition and literacy - 'If children possess a limited vocabulary or are not confident in their speech when they start school, they are likely to struggle with reading and writing as they move into Key Stage 1' (Ofsted, 2012b p2).

In the same way that *Talk for Writing* (Corbett and Strong, 2011) makes explicit the writing process; so explicit talk for learning takes a wider tack in exploring ways in which ideas are trialled, language is experimental, and opinions are developed, challenged and reformulated. The learning process and the language used to negotiate it becomes a more open and accessible process that can be modelled and agreed upon. In their extensive research that surveyed teachers in primary and secondary schools, Blatchford et al. (2006) found some damning responses about perceptions of group work. They observed a lack of consistency, structure and planning when it comes to collaboration and an inherent assumption on the part of teachers that social rules of talk will apply in group work situations (Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines and Galton, 2003). My Department observed that it was the social talk that interfered with using talk as a tool for advancing ideas and exploring learning together as much as there was a difficulty in engaging in the right kind of talk rather than just offering opinions in a turn taking situation.

As Chater (2015) points out in his review on policy on task design, perhaps it is time to tackle the curriculum and pedagogy from a different perspective. Rather than teaching from

tradition should we not be starting from what we want our learners to contribute to the future; instead of freedom *from*, why not begin with a freedom *to* premise? Chater opens up new possibilities by posing these questions and a child centred, pedagogical approach might be the way to develop such an approach.

Why do we need talk for learning at my school?

Many researchers (Wegerif and Scrimshaw, 1997; Scott & Asoko, 2006; Wegerif & Dawes, 2004; Mercer & Howe, 2012; Blatchford et al., 2006) have found that teachers assume that students know how to have productive discussions in groups and students' own interpretations of the rules of acceptable talk are somewhat different to those of the teacher. This has certainly been the case in my Department's observations of our students. In our discussions as a Department it became clear that along with teachers from other subject areas, we were identifying some specific problems with the use of talk in the classroom. Teachers identified some of these problems as:

- Students don't know how to start talk on a given task
- Students are reluctant to share
- Students would rather work on their own
- Students held a perception that individual work shows they are working harder
- When students got stuck they were unable to advance their ideas and their talk
- Students were easily side-tracked and often off task
- Collaboration skills in small group work and dyads were not effective
- Communication skills are needed for future employment and the kind of team work and communication skills required to work effectively were not being displayed
- EAL scaffolding works best when modelled by peers yet setting had created difficulties and the lack of TA support was also problematic

- Creativity was lacking
- Many students suffered from an impoverished vocabulary
- Some students found it difficult to access cultural references which would be helpfully explained by more knowledgeable peers

Along with the difficulties we observed in students' ability to work effectively together and use their talk constructively, there was also a need to address some of the perceptions about group work that Blatchford et al. (2006, 2003) highlighted; namely a caution about loss of control, students' inability to learn from each other, and wasting curriculum time through perceived unvalidated methods. Not only, did we need to address the enormous diversity of the way students had been taught given the start-up nature of the school and the huge range of learning experiences our students had had, we also needed to create some identity for our curriculum and to develop cohesion within the department. In short, there was a need to teach students how we wished them to learn, to teach teachers how to use creative and social constructivist approaches to deliver the curriculum, and to pay close attention to the context in which that learning takes place (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000). There was a need for explicit consideration of the role of group work and talk in English lessons. We were in a position to experiment with sociocultural and social constructivist approaches to learning and given the problems we identified it was an ideal fit to address many dimensions at once.

There also appeared to be a gap between the inspection criteria relating to talk of the various bodies that we are held to account by and the prescribed curriculum that they publish. The British NC (DfE, 2014), International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) criteria (Pearson, 2011a, 2011b), Inspection Frameworks from Ofsted (2015) and ADEC (2013) all have an element where talk and questioning is examined but not always included as part of a curriculum. What this talk must look like and what it must cover varied greatly. The focus on Government and Ofsted literature relies heavily on testing of Reading and Writing –

predominantly using Key Stage 2 SATs and GCSE data. The correlation between talk and writing and reading is not always fully explored. Even in Ofsted's report *Moving English Forward* (2012a), there is little discussion about talk or speaking and listening. It was important as a Department for us to embed the value of talk into our curriculum and make it an integral part of our design, convinced as we were about its potential to raise standards, help to deliver our creative curriculum aims and to address the difficulties previously identified.

Literature Review

What are the features of talk for learning (what does it look like?)

Talk for Learning is not one method to be picked up and delivered as a tool for learning and teaching in the classroom. More, it is range of different approaches that different researchers have observed as productive classroom talk or have developed as constructs and methodologies that can be encouraged, developed and implemented within a range of contexts and across different phases, ages and subjects. A range of types of talk have also been explored in the literature and go back to Piagetian and Vygotskian ideas about learning from others, social-constructivism and meaning making through social interactions.

Barnes (2008) argues that too often society presents an image of learning as something done by rote or seeking a right answer. The idea of what learning is, then, is an important construct for the teacher to establish as well as modelling questions and talk in their classroom. The dominance of the socio-cultural approach in looking at talk has emphasised this notion of a co-construction of using language to make meaning and develop reasoned argument (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). The socially embedded nature of talk and its influence on cognitive development has been explored by researchers and practitioners since

Piaget (1995) and Vygotsky (1978) both developed ideas about the influence on conceptual development through peer interaction. Vygotsky and his followers emphasise the learning that takes place through talk between students and their more able peers and teachers through scaffolding. Piaget's followers focus on peer interactions and development through collaboration with equitable pairs. However, as Mercer and Howe (2012) point out there is common ground between Piagetian cognitivism and Vygotskian socio-culturalism and part of that is the role language and active collaboration have on internal cognitive development.

The development of language as a tool for learning can have a major impact on the attainment of pupils and in the English classroom on the development of understanding and the quality of written work. Mercer and Littleton (2007) point out that collaborative skills and using language as a way to solve problems together are not part of every child's experience and therefore they too call for a greater emphasis on teaching how to use language as a tool for learning. Mercer and Howe (2012) also agree that without explicit help and guidance from teachers, children may not have access to the kind of language they need to reason, discuss, problem solve and work collaboratively and that it is not helpful for teachers to assume that children can apply their social language abilities to the same kinds of tasks that we are discussing here. Further, they argue that students need to be explicitly made to understand the importance and value of collaborative learning and have 'metacognitive awareness' (Mercer and Howe, 2012, p18) of the functions of talk.

A social constructivist approach has dominated research on the use of collaborative talk for learning but can be seen to merge with Piagetian ideas through the three stages of cognitive acceleration (CA) programmes (Gillies, 2014). The three areas are defined as cognitive conflict, social constructivism and metacognition. These all build on the work of early practitioners such as Barnes and Todd (1977) whose exploratory talk techniques paved the way and itself took up the co-constructivist language ideas of Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget

(1995) to create an application that was achievable in schools to develop the quality of talk. There are further similarities between the Exploratory Talk ideas of Mercer and his colleagues (Mercer, 2000; Wegerif, Mercer & Dawes, 1999) and Alexander's (2008) dialogic teaching. What Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick (2008) call *Accountable Talk* also has its roots in socio-constructivist theories.

In his paper calling for teachers to radically alter their perceptions of the use of language of their students, Barnes (1971) lays out 19 different types of talk that a teacher can expect to hear, use and encourage in the classroom ranging from monologues to the socio-cultural frameworks that underpin Barnes' & Todd's (1977) exploratory talk theories. Nearly 40 years on, the same kinds of talk are being heard and the same kinds of appeals are being made by researchers and teachers.

Talk in the Classroom

There is much criticism of the quality of classroom talk from researchers and much highlighting of missed opportunities and difficulties that beset implementing good talk. Despite the value placed on dialogue and communication to help create effective learning conditions and to mould independent thinking (Reznitskaya et al. 2009) classroom discourse is dominated by teacher led, monologic, traditional or closed questioning discussions (Reznitskaya et al., 2009; Blatchford et al., 2006, Mercer and Littleton, 2007) Bakhtinian theory (Bakhtin, 1981) observes that rather than the delivery of an accepted truth by one or more knowledgeable figures, dialogic interactions should be more egalitarian and reach a collective truth (Reznitskaya et al., 2009).

In reaction to these criticisms, Rojas-Drummond and Mercer received funding to improve and understand 'the quality of teacher-led dialogue and peer group activity' (2003, p99) for primary children in Mexico and Britain. Situated in sociocultural theory, and aligned with Vygotskian concepts of 'inter-mental' and 'intra-mental' development, their findings

were so compelling that they became integrated into the National Literacy Strategy and the National Strategy for Teaching and Learning (QCA, 2001, DfES, 2002). Their main findings were that: when talk is used and shaped for the task at hand, the resulting discourse enabled collective and individual reasoning; and careful integration of teacher led dialogue and peer discussion are of especial benefit to learners. In support of Mercer and Howe, Blatchford et al. (2006, 2003) strongly criticised the lack of group work in UK government policy and NC legislation at primary and secondary and although there has now been some adoption of these approaches to learning, at the time there was only scant mention in relation to the literacy hour.

Another proponent of socio-cultural approaches to learning whose work has become embedded not only in educational policy but in the fabric of new approaches to assessment and learning is Robin Alexander. Alexander (2008) criticizes the talk in the classrooms as being 'pseudo-inquiry' rather than being dialogic teaching. An over reliance on open questions that do not challenge students and that receive meaningless praise rather than useful feedback impede the learning opportunities available in good talk for learning environments. The Ofsted triannual report on English (Ofsted, 2012a) would support this view.

Alexander's dialogic approach and Dawes', Mercer's and Wegerif's (2003) *'Thinking Together'* project work have also advocated a similar approach through co-constructed talk for learning. Both approaches advocate more than just talk rules and opportunities for talk in the classroom, further they call for students to be actively involved and engaged in the construction of knowledge (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). A large number of researchers whose work has been based around actual classroom action research or practitioner research applications as well as a number of socio-constructivist theorist would agree with this view. (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003; Howe, 2009; Gillies and Khan, 2008). In her systematic

review of research on the use of talk in small group work in the Science classroom, Howe (2014) concludes that small group discourse undoubtedly aids and scaffolds peer learning.

There is a growing body of research that takes an Action or Practitioner research approach in applying some of these different models of talk for learning techniques. Reznitskaya and colleagues (2009) attribute the reluctance of change in using dialogue in education to its 'inherent complexity, inconsistency and uncertainty' (p30). In the US, decades long study that focuses on the use of cognitive reasoning (CR) as a psycho-educational framework, they call for further empirical evidence but conclude that CR helps to create schema that go on to help students achieve individually in testing later in their school careers. This is backed up by Kuhn, Shaw and Felton (1997) who also found long term benefits from the use of dialogic discussion. However, the findings are too general and cannot solely be attributed to particular discourse features to post-intervention success. Where they may be generalized, Reznitskaya et al. (2009) could be too specific in their focus on collaborative reasoning.

Talk in the English Classroom

Much of the research has centred on maths (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003, Solomon and Black, 2008), science (Howe et al., 2007; Baines, Blatchford, & Chowne, 2007) computing (Teasley, 1995) and the primary classroom (Galton et al. 1999; Mercer, 1996, 2000). There is perhaps an assumption in literature and language that talk is more inherent in these lessons and so teachers and researchers are less likely to explore this area.

Reading comprehension is the dominant form of assessment in English reading and thus the bedrock of any English curriculum in a multitude of forms. In their USA study of 21 elementary school lessons, Wolf, Crosson and Resnick (2005) discovered through quantitative and qualitative analysis that talk and collaboration as well as effective questioning engaged students in higher order thinking. Palinscar (2003) and Barnes (2008) would support the need

to move away from initiation-response-feedback (IRF) approaches and follow a more process driven pedagogy for reading comprehension that is student driven through discussion. In their instructional approach called *Questioning the Author*, Beck, McKeown, Hamilton and Kucan (1997) developed a series of queries such as teacher initiated discussion and open ended query in order to investigate the text and extend understanding through discussion. Their approach teaches students to self-mediate meaning as well as develop investigative skills when tackling reading.

There has been a growing amount of research on the improvement of reading and writing as a result of Alexander's similar *dialogic teaching* (Alexander, 2004) approaches to learning. The research emphasizes active collaborative learning and is aligned to Vygotskian theories. Practitioners such as Strong (2013) and Corbett & Strong (2011) in their books, written to supplement professional training for Primary and Secondary teachers in using talk for writing techniques, emphasise how talk can significantly improve and develop the quality of writing. Reed (2005), in his summary of his own teaching practice and in his review on research would also agree that talk is essential in developing meaningful writing and he taps into students own cultural experiences to bring out authentic voices in writing.

In his personal reflection on the dialogic pedagogies, Wegerif (2011) picks up on Solomadin's drawing on Russian poets to make sense of the dialogic as the development of a unique selfness. Wegerif himself draws on poets including Keats and Mallarmé to make sense of dialogic approaches as 'taking difference seriously' (p84). The fact that poetry and literature are cited and explored to find meaning behind dialogic pedagogies in my mind highlights the natural marriage between English as a subject of infinite possibilities and the rich learning that can occur through talk for learning approaches.

In terms of learning English as a language, research shows that talk for learning and collaboration can provide enormous benefits to EAL learners especially in terms of developing

the kind of academic and cognitive language that they may not hear in their own homes and that is necessary for academic success. Conteh, Kumar and Beddow (2008) worked with teachers in Bradford in an Action Research project looking at pupil talk in multi-lingual contexts. The joint University and Local Authority project gave teachers autonomy to formulate their own research questions and their findings were that talk for learning gave learners greater confidence, made them feel valued, enabled them to develop oracy skills, achieve learning outcomes, engage in and enjoy activities and improve social skills. Some teachers allowed students to break into their first language and Cummins (2012) would agree that bilingual instruction or opportunities for English learners, enable pupils to draw on richer cognitive understanding that they can then apply to their English work. Cummins (2012), with his emphasis on reading development in Canadian EAL learners, joins others (August and Shanahan, 2008) who criticise English language reading programmes that advocate a single dominant way to teach reading (such as phonics which is prevalent in the US, Australia and UK). In their work in Chinese and Korean contexts, Dong, Anderson, Kim and Li (2008) have also looked at the effects of *collaborative reasoning* on EAL language learning and moving away from recitation and into the exploration and more open reasoning of literature found in dialogic teaching. Cultural and international perspectives are not often as explicitly explored in the research.

None of the research in language use calls for using one particular type only. In fact many researchers ask teachers to guard against using just one type. For example, Mercer and Dawes (2008) highlight that talk must be both symmetrical and asymmetrical (with a more expert instructing or guiding another whether this is pupil-pupil, teacher-pupil). However, they still generalise that much questioning in the classroom is closed questioning. Arguably, this is not the case in English where much of the questioning seeks to draw out pupil opinion and reaction and interpretations to texts. Here is another reason why English does not fit neatly into the research.

Collaboration not cooperation

One important distinction to make when discussing talk for learning is that of the difference between cooperation and collaboration. Tolmie et al. (2010) categorized group work as typically falling under three types: peer tutoring, peer cooperation and peer collaboration. Collaboration is characterized as peers working together to reach a shared understanding and it is this element of peer interaction which is of interest in the English classroom. However, it is also about how shared talk takes the individual beyond what they might have been capable of alone. This socio-cognitive perspective draws on ideas from Piaget and Vygotsky amongst others as a catalyst for change (Tolmie et al. 2010). Gillies and Khan (2008) make no such distinctions when looking at how teacher discourses affect pupil discourses in what they call cooperative group work. They characterize cooperative learning as group work that provides 'opportunities to give and receive information, develop new understandings and perspectives, and communicate in socially appropriate ways' (p323). Some of the features described here are very similar to the features defined as collaboration elsewhere. Howe (2009) does not distinguish between these two terms either but she does define joint construction within group work as being one of two types. Type 1 is when more than one child actively contributes to discussion and Type 2 is characterized by a dominant child's ideas creating the group product with the acquiescence of the other members. In Type 2 the more competent other, usually a more able, peer is needed to scaffold learning in a Vygotskian ZPD situation (Vygotsky, 1978; Thompson, 2013).

The role of the teacher

Teachers have been criticized by some educational researchers for an over-reliance on IRF questioning. The use of closed questioning is prevalent and researchers such as Dillon (1994) claim that teacher questions using IRF should be discouraged. Rojas-Drummond and Mercer (2003) point out that teacher talk from studies all over the world has been seen as a

way of controlling classroom discourse and of measuring children against the teachers own expert knowledge. Alexander (2001) does not reach the same conclusions and like Mercer (1996) and Rojas-Drummond (2009) has found a variety of teacher discourses present in classrooms, internationally and in the UK (Rojas-Drummond and Mercer, 2003). In their joint collaborative study of classroom discourse, Rojas-Drummond and Mercer (2003) found that teacher questioning was not always used in the most productive way, tending to be monologic or episodic in terms of closed questions. Shepherd (2014), in his critical examination of teachers' discourse strategies, would agree that the dominance of teacher fronted lessons where students bid to give the right answer is still the dominant discourse in classrooms. However, his small scale study looked at only three experienced teachers' lessons in maths and reading over eight lessons in the US. Through reviewing his longitudinal international studies on classroom talk, Alexander (2008) would agree that the discourse in English and American classrooms is brief, undeveloped and closed. He contrasts this to French and Russian classrooms where the emphasis on language and extended dialogue is given greater emphasis in a more collective way that enables others to listen if not all are involved.

The teacher as mediator features widely in the research. In Adey and Shayer's (1994) cognitive acceleration (CA) programmes, students were given cognitively challenging situations but the teacher mediated their discussion 'through guided reflective abstraction' (Gillies 2014, p63). Earlier research by Brown and Palinscar (1989) used *reciprocal learning* approaches which reportedly helped primary aged children improve their reading comprehension through the use of collaborative learning which had been scaffolded by the teacher using instruction and modelling (Mercer, 2008). Anderson, Chinn, Waggoner and Nguyen (1998) have also found a link between teacher led talk and the improvements of reading and writing in secondary aged students and they focused on students developing extended contributions to discussion which are led by the teacher in collaborative reasoning sessions. This active approach and the flexible learning environment which allows students to

interact amongst themselves whilst being led by an expert are also aligned to Vygotskian ideas of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) learning with the teacher as expert. Thompson (2013), in his case study of a teacher student dyad also illustrates the dialogic interactions which led to pupil discovery, in this case, in writing ability.

Taking a classroom observation approach observing teachers who achieved better results in reading comprehension and problem solving, Rojas-Drummond & Mercer (2003) found their hypothesis supported that teachers who scaffolded pupils' learning through dialogue were able to achieve better results for their pupils. They observed three key characteristics: teachers used 'why' questions which encouraged pupil reasoning and reflection; 'procedures for solving problems and making sense of experience' was taught as well as content (Mercer, 2008, p93); teachers encouraged pupils to take an active role in their learning and saw learning as social and dialogic.

Research and theories from a number of prominent researchers and theorists (Alexander, 2004; Mercer, 1996, 2000; Wertsch, 1993; Rojas-Drummond, 2009) support the idea that the role of the teacher is essential to support Vygotskian and Wertsch's views that the 'functional structure of dialogue between adults and children is important for children's learning and development' (Mercer, 2008 p93).

In their study of 51 teachers in Australia, Gilles and Khan (2008) also concluded that the teacher plays a vital role in cooperative group work. They looked at how teaching the teachers explicit ways to scaffold learning to enable metacognitive thinking had an impact on the way teachers and students use discourse. Shepherd (2014) also calls for dialogic classroom discourse in order to tackle the inequalities of volunteer led pupil contributions where a lack of balance at turn taking diminishes everyone's learning.

Resnick (2010) outlines the important role that teachers play in scaffolding, challenging and articulating concepts and guiding dialogue. She argues that teachers play a

crucial part as they must manage discussion, model challenges to thinking, help to interpret and paraphrase so that 'all students are helped to understand and share important concepts in different texts and tasks and through interpretative questions' (Gillies, 2014 p64). This idea of interpretative questions is one that is picked up time and again by many researchers (Palinscar, 2003; Wolf et al., 2005; Pierce and Gilles, 2008) as the quality of the teachers' questions take on greater import and encourage a move away from IRF type lessons into constructive meaning making and discussion. Wolf et al. (2005) highlight the importance of this type of questioning in helping to understand text.

Dialogic talk is where the importance of the teacher is shown. According to Alexander (2004) the role of the teacher helps students to develop their own contributions through the formulation of their own questions and dialogue. Barnes (2008) would agree that the teacher's role in creating the right climate for dialogue is crucial. 'Part of a teacher's task in managing learning is the provoking of a questioning habit of mind, seeing to it that their pupils perceive there is a question to be answered before they head towards the material that can be used to answer it' (p14). This idea of the teacher helping to develop the right kind of thinking is also supported by Mercer and Dawes (2014) who would encourage students to use language to extend their understanding.

Trust is another important area that the teacher controls and helps to create. Just as Dong et al. (2008) found that EAL students need safe opportunities to try out their emerging language, so do students of all abilities need to feel that mistakes can be made and that discussion and questioning do not lead to guessing the correct answer in the teacher's head. Pierce and Gilles (2008) agree that trust is an important factor in the success of talk for learning in the classroom. These teacher researchers document how they work hard to create an atmosphere where students between the ages of 6 to 13 are encouraged to use critical talk when exploring literature and each other's ideas. In particular, they explore the use of

questioning and the positing of thesis style statements to provoke *interthinking*. Trust is crucial when encouraging critical feedback.

Explicit Teaching

Gillies and Ashman (1996) call for the same kind of explicit teaching of group work and collaborative skills as you use to teach academic content. They suggest that many teachers assume that by providing the conditions of group work, children will automatically fall into a state of collaborative learning. They found this not be the case in their study of 196 Grade 6 students who were put into two conditions – those taught how to collaborate to facilitate each other's learning and those who were grouped and simply told to help each other. Their results showed that those who had been explicitly taught how to collaborate consistently demonstrated more helping behaviours, identified with the group and used inclusive vocabulary, gave explanations and made their own decisions rather than rely on teachers. Gillies and Ashman (1996) also call for conditions and parameters to be set on children's learning that creates a situation where no one can succeed unless they all do.

In their large scale study of 51 teachers involved in using specific communication skills to challenge students' cognitive and metacognitive thinking in Australia, Gillies and Khan (2008) found that compared to cooperative and communication conditions, those who were explicitly taught techniques such as higher order questions, achieved significantly higher individual test results. Not only this, but the quality of talk in the classroom improved. In another large scale study, Fisher (1993); recognised that teachers needed to explicitly teach the skills of exploratory talk. Fisher's research documented the kinds of pupil to pupil talk observed during the SLANT project based in 10 schools and collecting data from 15 teachers, using technology in small group work contexts. Galton and Williamson (1992) also conclude that that students need to be taught how to collaborate and that they also need a 'clear idea of what's expected of them' (p43). Although these researchers looked at varying subjects and

age ranges, they all agree that explicit teaching of talk is necessary to raise achievement and improve the quality of talk.

Mercer (1996) points out that the ground rules for successful classroom discourse are seldom pointed out by teachers as the ground rules of this kind of exchange have become inherent and teachers are not aware of them. He also points out that to some students talk in the classroom might mean different things – the need to give the right answer or just to talk fluently. King (2002) and Gillies & Khan (2008) would concur that students need to be explicitly taught how to ‘exchange ideas, provide explanations and justifications, engage in speculations, make inferences, develop hypotheses, and draw conclusions’ (Gillies & Khan, 2008, p323) if they are to develop higher order thinking and effective discourse to develop metacognition.

The ideas about explicitly teaching students the skills to further their own learning through using specific techniques when talking with others also ties into Black and colleagues (Black, McCormick, James & Pedder, 2006) pursuit of Learning How to Learn (LHTH) and Assessment for Learning (AFL) techniques. For Strong (2013) the explicit is also about providing examples and structures for students to draw upon in her talk for writing guidance, she calls it making the learning visible. However, when using talk to structure writing, Carter (QCA, 2003) warns about the differences between the spoken word and the written word. He points out in his transcript of CANCODE data (a national database) that spoken language when transcribed and when spoken does not always follow the same grammatical rules as written words and can seem disjointed and incomplete not to mention grammatically incorrect. This will be a consideration therefore when thinking about teaching a model of talk if part of the learning is to aid students in their writing.

There is also a relationship between the use of peer feedback and assessment and the teaching of explicit talk for learning techniques through group work. Gielen et al. (2010) set

out certain conditions that are optimal for learning from peer assessment - frequency and timeliness as well as the opportunity for it to be acted upon. They also cite Mory's (2003) perspectives on how learning takes place through peer feedback. The ideas here connect well to talk for learning ideas – reinforcing student ideas or learning; opportunity to revise or validate ideas; and the 'provision of scaffolds'. Gielen et al.'s (2010) 43 Dutch grade 7 students were studied in three different sessions using a before and after comparison with equal status peers. Their findings suggest that the training of the students to give quality feedback was an influential factor on the impact of the effectiveness of the feedback. Tolmie et al. (2010) echo this view that training students in group skills has benefits in other areas – for them in their study of 575 British 9-12 year olds with a before and after qualitative study; their focus on improving classroom relations showed benefits from explicitly teaching group work skills. Alexander (QCA, 2003) asks the valid question of what features of language should be used and taught when dealing with more ambiguous ideas? This is certainly a question relating to the use of dialogic teaching in English where often quite abstract ideas are open for interpretation and students have to be trained to not see things in terms of right or wrong in subjective responses but to be encouraged to reason and discuss in the light of evidence. Whilst this wrestling of ideas dominates the mostly theoretical research alongside its criticisms of teachers' use of language, what is less examined is the practicalities of implementing such ideas. Criticisms have been levelled at research that much of it is divorced from the realities of the classroom (Blatchford et al., 2003). In their review of research alongside their presentation of the SPRinG project which provides a practical and experimental approach Blatchford et al. (2003) point out the gap between the potential benefits of group work and the limited use of group work in schools. The SPRinG project laid out a sequence of procedures from preparing the class environment to explicitly teaching students a sequence of skills to preparing teachers, lessons and activities. The whole process

was made explicit and the year-long project was made into a programme for primary and secondary schools.

Non-intervention

In contrast to the presence of the teacher in helping to scaffold and model talk, there is also a small amount of research that looks at the benefits of teacher absence. Mercer and Dawes (2008), in their chapter drawing on their own research and that of others dealing with exploratory talk, emphasise the value of students having an opportunity to use talk for learning without the teacher. Howe et al. (2007) found that group work was productive when teachers did not intervene but left students to reason and deliberate problems on their own. Barnes and Todd (1977) also found that students were more engaged and more likely to ask open questions and engage in reasoning when the teacher is not intervening. Barnes' (2008) thinking aloud together explanation of exploratory talk, which is hesitant and halting and experimental, suggests it is more freely developed when students are not trying to be caught being right or impressing the teacher.

In a Government publication Ofsted (2012a) criticises the lack of progress in Speaking and Listening (S&L). This triannual review of English based on inspection evidence identifies: 'a lack of attention to S&L; inconsistent development of literacy across the curriculum; the need to make pupils more independent of their teachers' (p. 12). The report goes on to say that schools have focused too heavily on test and examination results in order to get pupils to achieve national benchmarks thereby limiting the broader range of skills pupils need. This is hardly surprising given the high stakes of league tables and funding implications. However, despite the inspecting body itself calling for greater pupil independence, teachers are still wary of stepping back. Barnes and Todd (1977) pioneered the research on recording classroom based talk and analysing it in detail (Mercer, 1996). They found that when outside the 'visible control of their teachers', students were more likely to 'engage in open ended

discussion and argument' thereby achieving greater independence, ownership and autonomy (Mercer, 1996, p362).

Independence

By independence in this study, I mean not only the student's ability and aptitude for individual learning and student choice but also that a group can be independent together by exploring the ideas and questions of a task and reaching their own conclusions without prescriptive teacher input. There is also the element of being able to think for themselves and to form their own ideas, opinions and reactions in the English lesson and to develop greater agency.

There is a strong correlation between independence which comes in various forms – autonomy, choice, students thinking for themselves, deep learning and opinion forming – and cooperative group work. In 1994, Appleby asked how we get students to think for themselves in relation to discipline based conversations. His reflections on the Eurocentric, white male dominance of the literary curriculum combined with his assertion that teachers are expecting a right answer or a certain way of thinking have been taken up time and again and are as true in the UK and the international school today as they were in the US then. Picking up on teacher expectations of a correct answer, researchers have looked to socio-cultural constructs to develop greater student freedom of thought and autonomy - from jigsaw learning pedagogical approaches in the science classroom to (Hanze & Berger, 2007) less structured and open-ended approaches. Barnes and Todd (1977), Mercer (1996) and Gillies and Khan (2008) would all agree that greater independence is achieved through collaborative group work and that students develop internal schema to help them when they are working alone.

It could also be argued that independence is also about allowing or rather creating opportunities that make children take responsibility for their own behaviour (Blatchford et al., 2003) as children can hold each other to account in much more forceful and vociferous ways

than their teachers. Both Zimmerman (2008) and Hedegaard (2012) would agree that there are links between effective classroom dialogue and self-regulation and motivation as well improved learning outcomes. From a socio-psychological perspective, independence of thought and reasoning can also be achieved through talk as Mercer (2008) explores in his review of the research on teacher-pupil interaction and peer collaboration.

Pupil to pupil talk

Just as there are many criticisms of teacher to pupil talk, so there are many studies that critique the use of pupil to pupil talk. There is general agreement that pupils benefit enormously, both socially and academically, from collaborative talk (Gilles & Khan, 2008, King 2002, Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). Benefits include not only the internalization of problem solving skills and cognitive development as per the Vygotskian and social constructivist perspective but they also learn by giving and receiving help (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003) and trying out concepts aloud. The problem lies in the lack of high level discourse or exploratory talk. Pupils typically do not ask thought provoking questions or give reasons and explanations typified by exploratory or dialogic talk features unless taught to do so.

Pupil to pupil talk has distinctive features that are characterised more by socially driven criteria than they are by advancing learning or using their talk to solve problems. Fisher (1993) suggests that, at best, successful pupil to pupil talk is characterised by suggestions and challenges and consensus is only reached at the end of this kind of exploratory discussion. Wegerif and Scrimshaw (1997) would agree that productive pupil talk is not automatically achieved by placing students in groups. These researchers all found that the rules by which students conduct their talk are more social and allow more off task talk, more interruptions without being formally invited to speak, longer turn taking and frequent interruptions to agree, disagree or add opinion. There seems to be a lack of shared understanding between

the kind of talk the teacher expects and the kind of talk students find acceptable to complete a given task.

Talk amongst pupil groups have been characterised in many different ways. The most relevant for this practitioner research are outlined below.

Disputational talk (Mercer, 1996) begins with an utterance or initiation which is subsequently challenged but not necessarily built on or resolved to reach a new or shared understanding.

Cumulative talk (Mercer, 1996) can be characterised as utterances that are accepted and added to by the group without any argument or discussion and can often be superficial.

Exploratory talk, a term introduced by Barnes and Todd (1977) in their ground breaking studies into the use of talk in the classroom over many years of research and joint collaboration with schools, are initiations that are challenged and counter-challenged which develop the initial ideas and are modified to reach joint understanding or consensus. Exploratory talk does not introduce entirely new concepts but builds on learning.

Alexander, in his comprehensive review of talk research and his approach to teaching dialogic talk based on years of research across five countries, states 'if we want children to talk to learn – as well as learn to talk – then what they say matters more than what teachers say' (Alexander, 2004, p. 19). Dialogic talk is what Alexander (2004) refers to as collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful and it goes from whole group teacher-pupil exchanges to children freely articulating ideas to each other and beyond peer interaction and into the building of ideas with educational goals in mind. This socio-cultural perspective is closely related to Vygostkian ideas of the ZPD where more expert partners help to develop the understanding of others or for Alexander, where scaffolded dialogue and discussion provide the 'greatest cognitive potential' (p24) as well as the greatest skill from the teacher. It is also

similar to Mercer's (2000) *interthinking* approaches where rules are established by the class that encourage the sharing of ideas, respecting one another, listening and providing explanations. North Yorkshire's Talk for Learning project encompassed these talk rules to great success in their council led research (Alexander, 2004). Pierce and Gilles (2008) would agree that dialogic or *interthinking* collaborative talk are ideal in giving students a range of opportunities to develop different types of talk such as Social Talk, Meta-talk and Critical talk within their pupil to pupil exchanges and the more formal or rehearsed Presentational talk in whole class situations.

Pre-conditions

Some researchers call for a set of pre-conditions in order for talk for learning approaches to be truly successful. One of these is the varying ability groups considered to be optimal. Mercer & Howe (2012) found that children of similar ability did better than asymmetrical pairs in computer based learning. Their results highlighted that tasks in which children have to communicate are also more successful than those that do not allow children to do so. In contrast, there is evidence that students of differing ability make the best progress. Weinberger, Stegmann and Fischer (2007) attempted to measure knowledge equivalence and sharing in their study of collaborative learning. They define equivalence as 'learners becoming more similar to their partners with regard to the extent of their individual knowledge' (p416). This is different to shared knowledge which they define as the learners having the same knowledge as their partner already. Howe (2009) cites research that has the need for groups who do not begin with a similar outlook and whose collaboration is a process of genuine discovery and crucially not necessarily agreement. In fact, Howe claims that disagreement is a key factor in the growth of understanding after group work. Weinberger et al. (2007) do not call for such knowledge divergence and in contrast suggest that knowledge equivalence is an important starting point for collaboration.

Other sets of pre-conditions include the learning goals, the importance of the task and/ or need to solve a problem and the establishment of rules prior to collaborative engagement as per Mercer's rules of exploratory talk (1996). Galton and Williamson (1992) and Barnes and Todd (1977) argue for the importance of certain sets of preconditions for class discussion including the sharing of ideas about what is relevant and a joint view of what the aims are. These researchers also set out conditions for talk including the importance of sharing knowledge with others and crucially the importance of giving reasons and explanations to your discourse. Fisher (1993) asserts that a clear problem solving objective is crucial and must be made apparent to students in order for them to work optimally in a collaborative discursive way. Wegerif (2000) also calls for pre-conditions to collaborative learning as does Blatchford et.al. (2003) in their primary school study of students' engagement in group work. It seems that students need to be prepared to disagree and yet to build that difference into their learning rather than to allow it to cause resentment and this takes explicit teaching techniques.

If we take the sociocultural perspective as a shared view that does not separate the development of thinking and learning from the social communication of human interaction then we can see how Rojas-Drummond and Mercer (2003) propose the idea of teaching and learning being a single process rather than two strands of learning. They imply that the quality of dialogue is the lynch pin in educational success or failure rather than individual teacher skill or intrinsic student capacity. The argument for mixed groups and to group children and design tasks very carefully depending on the desired outcomes is compelling in this light.

Task Design

Successful talk for learning is also inextricably related to task design. The reason why much of the research has centred around technology, science and maths lessons is the problem solving nature of these subjects. As Mercer and Littleton (2008) point out there must

be some imperative for students to work successfully together as if the task is too simple and can be completed alone there is no real need for student's to work collaboratively with one another. Some activity theorists might point out that the short term identity of the group may keep them working together but it is important for them to have sufficient challenge and a vested interest.

Chater's (2015) criticisms of successive Government's prescriptive measures in the National Curriculum leading to increasing *deliverology* of long lists of content forcing teachers to teach in certain ways has restricted the freedom of teachers to choose their own pedagogies and to experiment with child-centred approaches. Task design has become more about covering the curriculum efficiently than it has about taking a pedagogical approach to learning.

Cultural and Multi-lingual contexts

Few studies look at the role of collaborative learning and talk in relation to multi-cultural settings although this body of research is growing in areas with large immigrant populations in the UK. However, the focus tends to be on language acquisition and inclusion rather than on a socio-cultural position of collaborative learning. Conteh et al. (2008) and Kumpulainen (1994) both tackle cross-cultural with the latter comparing the use of computer based talk in Finland and the UK and the former on EAL immigrant learners in Bradford. Both found that the benefits of talk for learning techniques included social as well academic or language acquisition improvements.

In his international study on talk in teaching and learning Alexander (2001) found that where Britain and the US were cautious about the power of talk and oral literacy due to having to negotiate 'cultural hegemony, minority culture and the politics of language teaching' (QCA, 2003, p 27); France embraced talk and it formed not only an integral part of their cognition tools for learning but also an integral part of their identity. Russia also made 'talk

and learning strongly collective activities' (p33). Alexander acknowledges the cultural situatedness of attitudes towards talk and dialogic teaching and does not advocate wholesale imitation but calls for something new that comes from merging our cultural foundations with those elements perceived as desirable in the teaching of cognitive uses for talk.

The effects of talk for learning techniques

According to Mercer (2000) 'the mental resources of two or more people working together can achieve more than the sum of their individual contributions (p3). Mercer and Dawes (2014) agree that students are 'likely to develop a deeper understanding of a topic if they also have opportunities to express their own ideas, hypothesise, hear the thoughts of their fellow students, argue, reason and gain feedback from their teacher when 'thinking aloud' through a line of reasoning' (p437-438).

Many researchers (King, 2002; Alexander, 2005; Mercer & Littleton, 2007;) agree on the correlation between the quality of talk in collaborative groups and the internalization of cognitive processes building on both Piagetian and Vygotskian theories. According to Piaget (1995) cognitive conflict brings about the co-construction of new ideas and understanding. A Vygotskian approach is more cooperative and looks at how joint activity and cooperation go towards forging new understanding and co-constructing understanding together. It is less a shift of view from one learner to another and more a joint reaching of consensus. Wertsch and Rupert (2011) have taken Vygotskian ideas about how a sign or tool kit can be used to mediate inter and intra-mental activity and extended it to include Bakhtinian ideas about how the context and sociocultural dimension to speech and activity can alter the understanding and performance of the task (1996, Fernyhough). In his development of a dialogic approach to creating a framework for developing higher mental functions, Fernyhough (1996) tries to pin down how talk can be used to develop these higher order skills. The ideas are merged to create a framework which sees interpersonal activity as the key to this developmental

approach. Whilst Fernyhough (1996) has a focus on early childhood autism in his research, his perspectives are useful in considering that such a framework might be possible in the classroom. Further, the work of Rojas-Drummond et al. (2013), Gillies (2014) and Alexander (2004) amongst others builds on the idea of dialogic talk leading to meaning making and the development of new perspectives.

One criticism of the social-constructivist research which takes a theoretical and somewhat philosophical stance in looking at the effects of talk is that it does not deal with the realities of the classroom and can be seen as separate from the curriculum that teachers must deliver and the testing that pupils must undergo (Chater, 2015; Cazden, 2008). One such area is how to marry exploratory and dialogic talk ideas with the realities of teaching grammar for example. In their discussion paper about spoken English in the classroom, the QCA English team (QCA, 2003) explore questions and papers posed by a number of researchers presenting a range of perspectives. Carter and Coffin (QCA, 2003) consider talk in the context of grammar. They ask questions about to what extent grammatical features of the spoken word and the nuances of speech should be explicitly taught. The conclusions reached suggest that frameworks for different generic forms of spoken and written English need to be planned for within the curriculum. Alexander (QCA, 2003) does not break talk into components such as syntax and grammar but lays out talk as a the kind of process that Barnes (2008) was emphasising when he called for a focus on exploratory talk to enable learners to process meaning and reshape knowledge rather than to learn inert knowledge. Wells and Ball (2008) offer a summary of conditions where classroom talk can become productive and thus move from monologic domains to inquiry oriented ones. After seven years of recording teachers in the primary age range, they concluded that through a sustained effort to incorporate inquiry based strategies and particularly by simply asking open questions, teachers can create a learning environment where students are involved in the production of meaning which leads

to deeper understanding and engagement. It seems then, that the problems of a curriculum at odds with process can be overcome through carefully constructed talk opportunities.

Traditionalists might argue that one of the most important things students must learn in their classroom is Standard English. This has been criticised in recent years for negating the richness and lived experience of the students' own experiences of language outside of school. In answer to whether one of the effects of talk for learning should be the assimilation of a single type of English to be used for academic purposes, Reed's (2005) view is that it is a necessity to use the language of the children's lived experience such as Jamaican English or any one of the 35 nationalities that influenced the English spoken in his Secondary School in London. Where Reed (2005) calls for students to be able to use these voices (in his study in forms of writing), Mercer and Littleton (2008) would argue that it is because students have this myriad of experiences of English that it is so important to explicitly teach the language of reasoning, problem solving and collaboration as they may never be exposed to this kind of talk in their everyday lives. In his discussion paper for the QCA exploring new perspectives for spoken English, Hewitt (QCA, 2003) offers a compelling argument for speaking as keeping alive a mode of oral heritage and story-telling and whilst he too taps into Vygotskian and Barnes' (2008) ideas about cognition and oracy theory, he concludes that this kind of talk is more useful due to its grammatical features of the spoken story and its aesthetics.

Cooperative learning tends to provide greater social benefits such as positivity (Tolmie et al. 2010) towards others whereas collaborative learning tends to create further conflict as it is characterized by differences of opinion and perspectives and there is not always resolution. The social formation of mind as a result of collaborative learning is well explored by Vygotsky (1978). Daniels (2016) also explores this element of Vygotskian approaches of the influence on others learning through shared dialogue. Smagorinsky (2012) highlights this in his approach to the treatment of those with mental health issues as well as in his earlier educational work.

Social benefits and social and emotional communication skills were also observed by Topping and Trickey (2007) using Philosophy for Children interventions.

Whilst there is still debate about the conceptual theories behind Vygotsky's theories of intersubjectivity, and on a more semantic level, the meaning of the translation of his work to 'language' rather than 'talk' or 'speech' (Wertsch, 1993, Mercer, 2008) there has nevertheless been a body of work that explores the sociocultural perspective of *interthinking* and a myriad of other terms for the importance of language and talk on children's formation of thinking and self-identity.

For Reznitskaya et al. (2009) the use of CR creates a new set of transferable skills through creating a new schema which they call argument schema theory (AST) which can then promote individual argumentation development and can be used for problem solving and internal discussion across all subjects and in the future. Levine and Resnick (1993) point out that the 'mere presence of others' (p588) has enough impact to affect cognition – either impeding or aiding it.

Other benefits include an improvement in cognitive operations (Mercer, 1996) and the ability to generalize to other areas when doing similar problem solving tasks. Howe, McWilliam and Cross (2005) also found that there are delayed effects from group collaboration. This practitioner research picks up on some of the findings included in the research of Howe's (2009) paper on collaborative group work. She reports on evidence that proves social benefits and the growth of ideas. However, where Howe differs is her focus on pre-conditions.

Finally, Zimmerman (2008) found that self-regulation and motivation were improved and developed through collaborative talk for learning pedagogies. Using online aptitude measurements, Zimmerman explored whether teachers could foster self-regulation and

motivation. Using think-aloud and open-ended methodologies, Zimmerman concluded that improvements could be made.

To summarise some of the benefits of effective talk for learning in the classroom are:

- Social benefits in student relationships and teacher-student relationships including the build-up of trust, respect and involvement (Pierce and Gilles, 2008).
- Long term problem solving skills
- Independent problem solving
- Team work and soft skills for employers
- Thinking beyond the task and developing creativity
- Higher order thinking benefits
- Helps students to co-construct knowledge
- Barnes and Todd (1977) state that students should be able to 'negotiate their own criteria for relevance and truth' (Mercer, 1996, p263).
- Developing internal dialogue and schema in order to tackle problems individually later on (Vygotsky, 1978).

It is on the basis of trying to achieve better quality of talk in our classrooms and by doing so achieve some of the effects that quality collaboration and dialogue can deliver that I undertook this practitioner research and explored literature pertaining to the explicit teaching of talk for learning techniques.

Methodology

Given the diversity of the cohort, the experience of the teacher participants, the curriculum, time constraints and the age of the student participants a qualitative, descriptive, interpretative (Strijbos & Fischer, 2007) approach was used. This placed emphasis on the situatedness of the collaboration in my setting and also looked at the situational factors.. The framework for the intervention was based around Alexander's (2004) indications of dialogic teaching alongside Mercer's Talk Lessons rules (2000). A list of Mercer's *exploratory talk* rules are listed below and these were used as a starting point for the Department when the Practitioner Research was introduced and became an initial guide for teachers in implementing their own strategies. This methodology was chosen to address the inexperience of the participants as researchers and to enable the Department to start with a clear and cohesive framework. Using a qualitative and descriptive approach allowed the researcher to gather data from the participants in a way they would feel comfortable collecting (through research journals) and give the teachers some input on the interpretations of that data to inform the research and encourage reflection on their own practice.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Mercer, N. (1995) ***The Guided Construction of Knowledge: Talk Among Teacher and Learners***, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

(Mercer, 1995)

Senior and Junior weekly Department meetings were held which had an agenda item for the intervention. There were also three additional hour long meetings for staff to share ideas and contribute to the focus group discussions. This enabled the researcher to give continued support and guidance to the participants.

In the first introductory meeting, the Department collaborated to give feedback and reflect on the nature of talk in lessons. The department then collaborated on what the features of good talk might look like and what we wanted to achieve. The discussion that drove our second meeting was - How would changing our approach to using talk have an impact on the learning in our lessons? Even with a difference of age ranges from primary to GCSE and with a range of teachers teaching different abilities and from different generations- there was much agreement.

The research conducted took a practitioner research explorative project approach (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch and Somekh, 2008). The following diagram illustrates the cycle of research which was chosen. It starts with the development of ideas and observations, moves on to research and then into action. Continual review and feedback allowed flexibility and continued adjustment to feed into the aims of objectives. This was helpful due to the inexperience of the participants in using practitioner research. It also allowed for a fluid timeline and for adjustments to the methods used in the action as the research progressed. This was useful for participants who took a little while to settle on the approach most suitable for their intervention group.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Altrichter, H., Feldman, A., Posch, P. and Somekh, B. (2008) ***Teachers Investigate Their Work: An introduction to action research across the professions***, 2nd Edition, London: Routledge

Figure 2 Methodology - Research Cycle (Altrichter et al., 2008)

Participants

Participants included 8 teachers each with a chosen focus group as follows making a total of 124 students from Y5 to Y10. In reporting the findings, each teacher has been numbered and each class has been given a corresponding number (C#). Although gender was not specifically being examined each student has been numbered within as boy (B#) or girl (G#).

Table 1 Teacher Participants and Intervention Groups

Teacher 1	Y5 (C1)	12
Teacher 2	Y6 (C2)	19
Teacher 3	Y7 (C3)	12
Teacher 4	Y7 (C4)	17
Teacher 5	Y7 (C5)	18
Teacher 6	Y5 (C6)	18
Teacher 6	Y9 (C7)	9
Teacher 7	Y10 (C8)	17

Two lots of 5 students chosen at random before the intervention were part of the student interview groups. In the findings, these students are labelled as IB# or IG# depending on gender as per the classes.

Discussion Groups

Teachers were put into focus groups to discuss their perceptions of effective collaborative talk in the English classroom. It was through these sessions that we agreed on our own set of rules and a way of taking our intervention forward into the classroom as a tool for teaching.

The researcher wrote notes during discussions as a record (appendix 1) and intervened as little as possible. Where the discussion faltered or moved too far from the target discussion, the researcher interjected with a question in order to stay on track and close to the focus of the research.

There were three formal focus group sessions recorded. There were also a number of progress discussions during Department Meetings and these were recorded alongside the minutes of the meeting and referred to as necessary. Many of these discussions were to ascertain what stage teachers were at, how many talk sessions they had had, and to share ideas about what was working well and what was not. During the intervention session there were 15 such discussions during Department meetings. There were also a number of informal discussions as teachers encountered the researcher in the staff room and corridor immediately after a lesson or when they came to deliver research journals or simply come and tell the researcher about a particularly good or bad talk session. The researcher recorded these instances in research journals.

Students were also interviewed using a semi-structured approach in order to get their perception on how they use talk to further their learning. A list of questions (Appendix 2) was drawn up by the researcher and used as a framework to keep the interview moving. Students were randomly selected as a sample from each of the classes involved and only 5 children were in each group. The interviews took place in the library, away from their normal teaching space and within their timetabled English lesson time.

Observations

In order to allow teachers to exercise autonomy and control over the sessions and due to the relationship of the researcher as HOD, the researcher asked to be invited to sessions where teachers were using their talk for learning intervention techniques. This was to keep separate her role as HOD from the collaborative nature of the research. All but one

intervention group was observed up to three times by the researcher and research journals were kept by the class teacher after each talking session (examples in appendix 3). Notes were taken during the observations by the researcher during the sessions. Two teachers were observed twice and one teacher four times. At times, the researcher sat with specific groups as directed by the teacher but mostly the researcher was free to choose groups and sit either directly with dyads or groups or in different spaces slightly away from any one group.

The teacher appraised the researcher of the context of the lesson and the particular activities of each lesson observed. Due to an open door policy within the Department, the observations were mostly quite relaxed and often quite last minute. This was facilitated by our classes being taught along the same corridor allowing easy and direct access. One or two teachers occasionally preferred a formal approach to the observation.

Teachers' Research journals

Every teacher kept research journals on their talk lessons. The researcher first provided an example of her own research journals (appendix 4) in order to guide teachers into a way of recording the talk that was happening. Teachers were invited to hand in their hand written notes or to type them up as they desired. They were also invited to record talk sessions using a Dictaphone but none of the teachers took this option.

The format of the lessons

Every teacher involved in the practitioner research began with a lesson to introduce the talk for learning and to set rules (Mercer, 1995) and elicit class participation. The teachers were advised by the researcher what this might look like (appendix 5) but ultimately each teacher was able to deliver this introduction in any way they chose. Each group came up with their own rules (appendix 6) which were then clearly displayed in the classroom.

Teachers then looked at their planning to see where they could add talk lessons or build on discussion already planned for.

Some of the different approaches the teachers used in formatting their lessons included:

- Remind them of the rules before every talk lesson
- Create question starter banks
- Create an assessment framework
- Use praise and housepoints
- Use the GCSE criteria to assess them
- Modelling talk – giving them the words
- Modelling questions

Collaboration

Collaboration took place on many levels – on one level as a Department we worked together to identify the problems with the learning and talk in the classroom, teachers then collaborated with students in their target group in order to set rules and expectations, students then collaborated with each other during talk for learning lessons. During meetings regular feedback was given and collaboration occurred with teachers helping each other to solve issues that were arising and making suggestions and sharing their own findings. Teachers also collaborated with TAs and other Departments including the SEN and EAL Departments in order to appraise all participants in their role during talk lessons.

Team teaching for some of the talk lessons was also established following the Departmental approach of shared good practise, collaboration and workshop style lessons to introduce topics and to punctuate units of work with big thinking lessons. This collaboration did not just create opportunities for teachers to teach together and learn from each other but

it also provided collaborative opportunities for students who then had to use the skills they utilised in their smaller groups in new settings.

The researcher also delivered INSET on Talk for Learning for staff from pre-prep to Senior, inviting colleagues to explore any of the types of talk that were discussed at the INSET.

Furthermore, the researcher invited the SMT to use talk for learning as a model all the way through the school including staff meetings. The researcher invited the school to reflect on whether we as adults listen to each other, use our talk to collaborate and reach shared understanding and really listen to each other. The researcher was appointed Head of Teaching and Learning and has left this as a development point with the committee for next year and the new incumbent.

Following the practitioner research intervention, further collaboration will also continue to a wider audience. The researcher is collaborating with the UK sister school to share findings with the teaching and learning committee and the Heads of English. After taking up a new post in September 2016, the researcher is also sharing the research and collaborating with a new Department of colleagues.

Ethical Considerations

The research was entirely within the bounds of normal good practice within the school setting and was undertaken by a Department of professional colleagues to improve the standards of teaching and learning within the Department and to benefit the school community. Ethical approval was sought from and granted by the University of Oxford Central Ethics Committee and the whole project was in compliance with the ethical considerations as prescribed by the British Ethical Research Association (2011). Teacher and student participants and their parents were given full explanations about the purpose of the research. Permission was requested by letter from the Headmaster of the school. Letters to parents and

guardians of all students involved in an intervention group were sent with an-opt out return slip. One parent returned the slip but later withdrew it on finding more about the project from the class teacher. Permission was also sought from parents and guardians where photographs were taken. No audio recording or video were made. Students in focus group discussions were given the right to withdraw at any time without any further implication.

All data was held securely on a password protected computers and any paper recorded journals were held in a locked filing cabinet. All participants were advised of their right to withdraw and their anonymity and that of the school and its pupils was protected.

As Head of Department, in order to negate the effects of the power paradigm, the researcher made it clear that any observations were about the students and their use of talk and related only to the research and the teachers' chosen interventions. However, it was impossible to divorce the dynamic totally.

As Altricher, et al. (2008) point out, there are ethical issues involved in teacher journals as semi-public documents. Reflecting the private perception of the 'journal' the researcher did not demand to see journals but only what the teacher chose to hand in. Most teachers were happy to hand in the pages they wrote their lesson notes on which then formed part of the researcher research folder. Two teachers preferred to hand in their notes typed up at the end. Most teachers did a mixture of these things but more from a consideration of legibility of handwriting than anything else. Two teachers stated the desire to do a good job for the researcher as a reason for typing up full notes although this was never asked for.

Findings

Pre-intervention focus group discussion

Teachers were able to talk at length about whether talk was effective in their classrooms and their expectations of talk and how they would like to use it. Following a focus group discussion, teachers in my school suggested that the following are some of the features of good talk in class:

- Interrogative questions
- Giving reasons
- Including others in group work (inclusivity)
- Peer scaffolding
- Small group work collaboration (distinct from cooperation)
- *Interthinking*

In response to RQ1, all the teachers felt that this was definitely something that could be achieved. Many had never thought of teaching specific talk rules before and there were suggestions about what explicit teaching might look like during our focus group discussion. These included:

- Create banks of questions, T1 “we use word banks for everything else, why not for this?” (Years 5 & 6)
- Do it like a game
- A prompt taking them through each stage of the discussion
- Model really good conversation
- Get students to write their own success criteria for good group work
- Role play a bad discussion
- T8 “Tell them that you are looking for it more” (the features of good talk)
- Question dice or prompts
- Model really good answers as well as really good questions
- Create a talking project that is formally assessed

Pupil Perceptions of talk in lessons

In their responses during discussions in lesson one of the intervention teachers reported students as having an awareness of what bad group discussion looked and sounded like and what good collaboration sounded like. Students commented on turn taking, some people talking too much, "not everyone takes part equally" (IB4), some students are silly or distract the group, some students don't listen and need everything repeating. Students focused on fairness, frustrations and interruptions and being "bossed about" (IG5) as particularly annoying elements of group work. Fairness issues revolved around some students doing all the work whilst others do nothing, "everyone not having a say" (IG3), somebody dominating the group, task difficulty and timelines.

IB4 "But then if everyone doesn't get to say something that's not fair."

Similar responses were given in the focus group discussion conducted by the researcher where students typically responded with a range of views from preferring to work on their own, to enjoying group work but not always learning anything during it because of chatting to friends. Students were also quite vehement about not liking to have groups chosen for them and preferring to work with friends. When asked why students cited reasons to do with working better with their friends, not getting along with others, others not taking part properly and the range of frustrations reported above.

Students were able to identify good collaboration and their responses included:

IB2 "its good if you have to do something really hard that you couldn't do on your own"

IG3 "Or if it's a lot...a lot of things, different things that you need more people for"

IB1 "Yes then you can divide stuff up and everyone gets to do a bit they like"

Another group referred to the types of activities they liked doing in groups

IG1 "when it is drama and we have to make something together."

IG3 "poetry is, like, I think really difficult and like when you have other people then they can like help you when I don't understand something."

Research Journals and observations

At the start of the intervention nearly all the teachers recorded research journals that highlighted the need for explicit talk for learning. Observations ranged from 'conversation started with total non-comprehension' (T5) to 'on observation of the group working alone – they were off-task and shouting over one another. They were reminded of the rules and left to work but T intervention was needed' (T2). When working directly with groups at the start of the intervention students still found it difficult to follow the talk rules 'The T ended up scribing but the students struggled to listen to each other's ideas or extend/ build on sentences' (T2). The exception to all of the groups was the Y10 who needed very little guidance in identifying effective collaborative and talk strategies and who were able to model effective *interthinking* and exploratory talk from the start. In fact, the Y10 group proved the exception throughout the intervention. The teacher decided that the issue here was more that they used challenging and disputational talk and their preference for individual work was born out of arrogance that nobody else could teach them anything and from a certain amount of competitiveness. It was also that their maturity did not match their intellect so that their ability to conduct themselves socially in small groups work was not effective. This provided a different set of challenges for the teacher.

Two teachers also reported difficulties in getting Teaching Assistants (TAs) to follow the rules established and rather than being a help in steering and modelling talk, they were a hindrance, allowing off-task chat; allowing students to conclude talk before they had really given any reasons; giving students answers without allowing them to talk and explore for themselves. Teachers then had to give TAs explicit instructions as well as the students and to

assign TAs specific tasks in order to achieve the aim of greater independence and joint construction of meaning without having it imposed on them.

With the exception of C8 all the target groups were eager to engage with the class rules that had been established. These were on display in the classroom and in many of the groups, were used by students and teachers to refer to and kept students on track.

T5 What's happening now?

C5B1 Oh we're just waiting.

(C5B9 & C5B10 on laptop)

C5B1 What did you get for your Arabic exam?

T5 What are the rules?

C5B9 *(Looks at rules)* To keep talking about the subject

T5 Exactly, stay on task

Given our senior students' constant access to the internet, our students were able to be resourceful and look for answers in the manner that Mercer and Dawes (2008) lay out where students talk, then resource their own learning. What they were not successful at was undertaking the talk and using their own ideas to theorise before looking for answers online. In C5, this was something that was explicitly taught through teacher modelling with the students in small groups and students became less reliant on technology and more reliant on each other as the weeks progressed. The findings suggested that there need not be one single approach to developing good talk for learning techniques. What was clear, however, was that teachers needed to be consistent with the approach they chose. There were two teachers for whom this was especially true. C3 experienced too many different kinds of techniques, and C8 needed greater consistency. T8 theorised that perhaps through experimentation it was important to see what would and would not work with this group and with more time, a method could be chosen and followed.

T3 was not explicit enough with their use of questions and the students focused instead on sticking to more practical rules such as speaking in English, asking question (albeit

surface level ones) and taking it in turns. Ability groups also seemed to play an important part in the success or perceived failure of the talk lessons with more mixed ability groups doing better than bottom or top sets.

Putting words in their mouths

One of the techniques that seemed to be widely used by teachers was to literally put words into the students' mouths to help them to articulate ideas or to re-frame or remodel ideas expressed or a way to conduct a discussion or ask a question more successfully or in a more accomplished manner.

T7 Who agrees with that?

C7G2 No way

T7 Why not?

T7 So you found that one really intense and emotional? (picking up on their earlier discussion)

C7B1 Yeah

It became necessary for this teacher to give the students the words to use and the way to use them based on a variety of things she had already heard them say. Giving students the right kinds of questions to ask also became very explicit in some of the teachers' lessons. In the following extract, the students are discussing poetry and applying their analytical skills to extract meaning and interpretations.

C7G1 I think '*frowning barrel*' is personification.

T7 But why?

C7B3 Because it's frowning

T7 But why is it frowning? Ask him, John.

C7G1 Why is it frowning?

C7B2 Because it's overshadowing. No, because it disapproves of the war...I think...

C7B3 and he is '*moved by his own equipment*'.

T7 What does that mean?

C7B2 It means he is...it's mocking him in the war.

T7 Does it?

C7B1 It means it's not rotten.

T7 used question prompts to get further insight into the students' thinking and to encourage them to ask questions of each other and to give reasons for their ideas. The teacher had also encouraged some *interthinking* by asking the student who made the original statement not to give reasons himself but to ask their partner for a reason. Whether this was deliberate was not clear. However, the pair were encouraged to add to each other's constructed interpretation and reach an agreement about meaning.

T7 consistently used this direct questioning technique and some weeks into the intervention recorded this exchange:

C7G5 Is this talking about a tree and it's trying to compare it with people?
Chris, you start.

C7B6 It's about a tree that's not made to bear a lily...I don't really understand.

C7G5 You said it's about a tree, is it an actual tree or a symbol?

C7B6 Let's take the literal meaning...

C7B7 It says '*and if this tree were discontent*' so it means...it's saying the tree is say conscious because...

C7G3 But did they really say that?

The students have clearly taken on board the importance of questioning to elicit further answers and explanations from each other and they have also begun to challenge each other and work towards constructing a joint meaning.

Some of the teachers aligned their talk lessons with one particular unit of work and built in reflection time at the end of the unit for students to consider how having talk rules had helped them. There were lots of positive responses from the students – some through discussion with the teacher and others through student recorded reflections.

"It made our answers more informative." C5G9

'Everyone got to share and understand their perspective.' C7B1

"Everyone contributed more." C5B6

'It made it more fair because everyone had to say something in the group and do an equal part of the [activity].' C2B8

‘We knew what we had to talk about.’ C7B4

‘We discussed very indepthly about our own interpretation about the poem in the order that we discussed.’ C7G3

“it made me stay on task.” C5G3

The fact the students were using the language of the rules themselves after 10 weeks of intervention illustrates the impact the rules made on students in these year groups. They were also addressing some of the issues that they themselves had raised.

The presence of the teacher

It was widely felt that the presence of the researcher and or the teacher in close proximity to the older learners changed the way students used talk. Talk frequently became more focused and specific. At the beginning of the intervention this behaviour was observed as students overtly remaining on task rather than successfully using explanations or questions to increase their understanding.

When the teacher or observing researcher were present there was more attempt made to reach an agreement or find an answer to present what they thought the teacher wanted to hear. However, this changed somewhat as the interventions went on and teachers observed that students did not overtly differ their talk when the teacher approached but were engaged in developing their own ideas and opinions whether the teacher was there or not. In C5, one of the talk rules was ‘Think’. Over the weeks, the teacher recorded times of group contemplation as the students thought about how to answer each other’s questions, respond to the task and take their talk further. This happened, to begin with, through teacher prompting and presence but later spontaneously in the teacher’s absence.

Other factors that altered whether the talk was productive were whether it was to be included as a piece of assessment; this was particularly the case with the C8 and the lower ability C3 and C4 whose teacher decided to attach more importance to assessment and rewards than other teachers.

Task design/ the role of reflection

Task design varied enormously amongst the teachers' interventions. T7 designed tasks around a poetry unit that on observation and through notes was highly successful in developing the kinds of exploratory, *dialogic*, *interthinking* that we were aiming for. In the final focus group with teachers, many agreed that problem solving tasks such as poetry analysis was a good match for our talk for learning.

On observing one of the younger classes, T1 increased opportunities for group collaboration but kept a tight structure and maintained closed tasks and questioning. This group was a very low ability group with a range of language competence both written and verbal. It was perhaps the difficulty in addressing the needs of these pupils and with the teacher's emphasis on teaching them the basics of grammar, that the task design was teacher led and comparatively rigid. In one early lesson, dyads were asked to turn a playscript into dialogue.

C1G2 Question mark.

C1G3 Yes but...

C1G2 How do you spell?

C1G3 It doesn't really matter just put the question mark.

(G2 starts reading from the board, off task)

(Several minutes of no talk at all just turn taking in writing the dialogue onto the shared sheet)

C1G3 until Charlie.

C1G2 announced Charlie, suggested Charlie.

C1G3 I want to write 'replies'.

C1G2 But he didn't reply. Commented *(takes sheet and writes own sentence)*.

This exchange was typical of early lessons across the intervention groups where typically one person dominated the exchanges, there was a lack of equity but there were moments where discussion might have been able to move from disputational to dialogic. In

later lessons, this group were given opportunities through discussion and role play to experiment more with the kinds of talk we were looking to develop. Interestingly, this group also had the longest and most complex list of talk rules.

Refuting the large body of evidence of computer based tasks and the positive development of talk, most teachers took the opportunity to restrict the use of laptops as they found that an over reliance prevented students from talking to each other, and gave the students more opportunity to work alone. This was true in the two older year groups (T7 & T8). Tasks were designed that engaged pupils in talk without giving them access to look up answers or others ideas.

Reflection and review time was given at the end of the lesson from several intervention groups. T5 highlighted how each of the groups kept to the talk rule (or didn't as the case may be) and also reviewed how that affected the quality of what they produced. 'The performance element (task design) was really good for highlighting this as the group most on task and keeping to the rules produced the best performance.'

Focus group discussions

In the ongoing discussions teachers many things emerged. In summary:

- Teachers agreed that there were some cultural implications but as the intervention progressed these were increasingly minimised as students grew in confidence and were able to keep talk with other genders to a set of agreed rules.
- All teachers felt they benefitted from working with their peers in other phases.

Primary specialists understood the expectations in the senior school better and senior teachers understood the different ways their junior colleagues worked and how they prepared the students.

- Teachers felt they were providing students with vital skills to prepare them for the world.
- All teachers found a greater on task engagement with intervention groups.
- All teachers found that intervention groups began to self-regulate behaviour.
- Most teachers found that tasks that challenged students to work things out for themselves helped students understand better.
- All teachers found the quality of talk improved.
- Teachers and students use of questions improved and more reasons were given.
- Students' social relationships improved within the class.
- Some students increased in confidence and there was greater participation.
- Students were increasingly able to build on each other's ideas to reach new understandings.

Discussion

Given the autonomy of teachers to find their own ways of engaging students in talk for learning techniques, there was an enormous variety of tasks and techniques employed. Unlike Fisher (1993) who called for there to be problem solving to sufficiently challenge students, some teachers found that drama tasks, where students were reliant on the cooperation and contribution of all members of the group, elicited responses that deepened understanding about a given scene or the meaning of a particular set of dialogue.

The 'mere presence of others (Levine et al., 1993 p588) affected the results and helped to develop better quality talking and thinking. Just the action research itself, by forcing teachers to have a greater presence through recording the dialogue and by forcing students to talk to one another, was a catalyst for cognitive development without even teaching them explicitly how to develop their *interthinking* and co-construction skills.

As Tolmie et al. (2010) suggest in terms of pre-conditions – the groups chosen for intervention did not necessarily have the social harmony as they were in sets and may well have been divided from students they knew well. Therefore, perhaps some of the reasons of choosing this intervention and of identifying talk as a problem were due to the fact that students were set in a large number of subjects and often learnt in groups that did not include good friends or that even remained the same. Hence they were continually renegotiating their roles in different settings. In contrast to Weinberger et al.'s suggestions, prior knowledge was not controlled fully in the sample groups. However, what was encouraged was the *transactive* sharing of knowledge through divergent viewpoints (Weinberger et al., 2007).

The readymade truths that Bakhtin (1981) refers to were still sought by students and teachers in some of the talk observed although there was decreasing chalk and talk. Teachers did sometimes interject with the instruction of truth rather than creating further questions for students to reach their collective truth through shared dialogic interaction.

Despite teachers claiming in focus group that they did not explicitly teach what might be called exploratory talk, in observing target groups before intervention, two teachers clearly modelled the kind of talk they were looking for in the lesson. In one, the teacher posed a question, allowed wait time (Ingram & Elliott, 2013) and then asked for responses.

C2B3 I be a gangster

T2 Becoming a gangster I would...

C2B3 You wouldn't have to pay money on planes

T2 That would be good for the environment wouldn't it?

Whilst this talk was the introduction to the lesson and involved teacher-led whole class discussion, the teacher was setting up and modelling the kind of talk where students have to think together and give reasons behind their choices for a later phase of the lesson. For the most part, however, the talk observed pre-intervention was made up of episodes of

disputational talk (Rojas-Drummond and Mercer, 2003; Mercer, 1995), pockets of exploratory talk, individual contributions that were never built upon or reasoned, off task talk and at times no talk until the teacher intervened with a starter question.

Galton (QCA, 2003) points out that Alexander, Mercer, Edwards and others have all characterized the scaffolded activities and class discussions observed in their research as not so much open discovery based explorations as 'cued elicitations' (p48) akin to direct instruction as the teacher is really only looking for one answer through their heavily hinted 'open' questions. I would agree that teachers did attempt to create open dialogic opportunities during the intervention but that constraints of time and curriculum as well as examination prescriptions made it difficult for teachers to be truly freed cued elicitations.

Whilst my setting did not have the Free School Meals element of disadvantage that creates such a profound gap in literacy levels in the UK, there were all the other elements identified in statistical analysis of those falling behind in literacy (Ofsted, 2013, NLT, 2015) – EAL, boys (Emirati boys for us were a particularly low achieving group), SEN and other factors that the UK do not have in such abundance such as a nanny culture and affluent neglect issues. In the same way that Ofsted (2013) found that an emphasis on speaking and listening raises attainment, we have observed that our emphasis on talk for learning has improved non-native speakers command of standard English, improved the quality of writing for all low ability groups and for those in middle and high ability groups. This is in line with Conteh et al. (2008) and Cummins (2012).

Teachers naturally designed their interventions in such a way that they aligned social constructivist and Vygotskian theories. They explicitly taught their students what Gillies (2014) outlines so neatly as the basis of co-construction and of knowledge and understanding

'they learn to listen what others have to say, challenge each other's perspective, and build on one another's ideas to arrive at an agreed position. During this dialogic process, the teacher guides and scaffolds students' discussions, encouraging them to

argue constructively, augment the ideas of others, and consider a range of alternative explanations for the phenomena they are discussing.’ (p64)

The anomaly of the Year 10 group was perhaps what Mercer and Howe (2012) might consider insufficient metacognitive awareness of the learning functions of talk (p 18). These students failed to see it as a tool for learning or as important in consolidating ideas or developing collaborative learning. Perhaps the pressures of the GCSE syllabus and a lack of understanding about what they might individually gain from developing this kind of talk was not clear enough. I am convinced, however, that with more time this group would also see the benefits of this socio-cultural approach especially if it was further validated throughout the curriculum. Perhaps there was also not sufficient freedom *from* (Chater, 2015) syllabus restraints with the delivery of content in order to gain good results at GCSE overshadowing the potential and freedom of the teacher to pursue a more pedagogical lead as Chater is arguing for.

In pre-intervention observations, pupils and teachers demonstrated the kind of talk found by Galton et al. (1999) where the teacher is eliciting an answer to one question and the pupils whilst sat in groups are individually contributing an answer but not building on anything. Pseudo-inquiry (Alexander, 2004) also featured highly and much of the observational research that criticizes the quality of teacher lead talk and pupil to pupil talk was in evidence at the pre-intervention stage.

In the same way that the Mexican study found similar effects and results as the UK study in the intervention by Rojas-Drummond and Mercer (2003) our findings also supported the view that talk for learning techniques not only increased the productive and exploratory nature of talk but also the students were able to formulate opinions and ideas more independently as a result of the intervention both when working in groups and when working alone. Certainly for the teacher who tackled Y10, Howe’s (2009) claim that those who are

perfecting acquired skills are less successful in collaboration may ring true. This teacher discovered that there was less knowledge development and more social benefit in line with Pierce and Gilles (2008). It was also difficult to tell whether students were indeed knowledge convergent at the start or whether some played devil's advocate. It is here that applications to problem solving subjects such as maths and computing may give more concrete answers. Certainly for English, opinions were shared, formed and adjusted as a result of discussion but it was the way this was done that developed the confidence of some students and allowed others to take a more considered and generous approach to their learning.

Barnes (2008) defined exploratory talk as not providing new information but constructing meaning from information available to them. The findings of the teachers and researcher in this study, however, did find that talk for learning provided new understandings and the peer to peer talk did have the capacity to provide new information that the teacher might not have.

RQ1 Can talk for learning be explicitly taught?

Teachers found that there were a number of ways that talk for learning could be explicitly taught and maintained. In the final focus group discussion however, they agreed that it was difficult to maintain at times due to the constraints of teaching examination materials and grammar in particular. Teachers used a range of techniques building on Alexander (2004), Mercer (2000) and Barnes (2008) in particular. The results support the majority of the research that establishing rules (Mercer, 2000; Mercer and Dawes, 2008); teacher modelling; scaffolding (Howe, 2014; Thompson, 2013) reflection and self-evaluation (Wells and Ball, 2008); using open questions (Blatchford et al., 2003; Barnes, 2008); teacher initiated discussion (Beck et al., 1997) and considering task design (Fischer 2003; Thompson, 2015) are all techniques that are achievable and successful in the explicit teaching of talk for learning.

They agreed with Pierce and Gilles (2008) that issues of trust were crucial to developing successful talk and that a certain number of pre-conditions were also beneficial (Blatchford et al., 2003). These included the importance of preparing the environment, planning and for some teachers, keep students in the same small groups rather than moving them around.

RQ2 Does the teaching of talk for learning improve the quality of collaborative group work?

The quality of collaborative group work certainly improved across all the intervention groups including the Y10 group. What differed was what the teachers judged collaborative group work to be and this was in direct relation to the groups they chose. It may well be that for the same teacher with another group, the quality of collaboration may have looked a little different. For some teachers, the students actually listening to each other was the most important factor. Like many of the research approaches to talk for learning but notably Mercer (2000, 2008), Alexander (2004) and Wegerif and Scrimshaw (1997), listening takes on a particularly important role in talk lessons.

Another important factor on judging whether the quality of collaborative group work had improved was the task design and the purpose of the talk lesson. Where this led to a piece of writing, teachers agreed with Corbett and Strong (2011) and Reed (2005) as they had not only observed more productive use of language through discussion but also through the following student's writing. This was something that took longer to emerge suggesting the idea of cumulative talk (Alexander, 2004) is a crucial part of the process in talk for learning. Teachers who had focused on using talk to scaffold writing reported that intervention groups achieved on the whole, higher than expected progress on end of year tests. However, as this was not a quantitative study, we did not measure the statistical spread officially. The quality of pupil to pupil talk began to resemble some of the more beneficial qualities such as the giving and receiving of help (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003) and asking higher level and

provocative questions (Gillies and Khan, 2008). Consensus was also observed. Dialogic, (Alexander, 2004) exploratory and cumulative talk (Mercer, 2000) were all observed increasingly as the intervention progressed and the quality of classroom talk definitely improved.

RQ3 What are teachers' perceptions of the value of talk for learning?

All of the teachers could see the benefit of using talk for learning and all of the teachers saw the need for it in our setting. Many of the teachers had not given talk as much consideration in their teaching of English as specialists as they had to reading and writing. All of the teachers said that they enjoyed the new perspective. Their perceptions at the start of the intervention support findings that there is an assumption that students know how to use talk to develop their learning. The teachers perspectives also supported the view of Chater (2015) that continual changes in the curriculum, an emphasis on developing grammatical content and the testing systems in place for English, make it difficult to develop a more process based curriculum (Barnes, 2008). Teachers also agreed with Corbett and Strong (2011) that there is too much emphasis placed on writing and reading and not on how to use talk to develop these skills and others.

The teachers also agreed that talk for learning took effort and commitment as a teacher in line with Reznitskaya et al. (2009) who found that teachers avoided developing dialogic techniques due to its complexity and inconsistency. For some teachers, where highly structured tasks were their staple tool, adjustments had to be made to embrace this uncertainty. Contrary to Gove's (2013) perceptions, teachers perceptions were that it is harder to constantly explicitly teach students how to question, how to use their language and to keep them working together as well as to design the right environment for good talk to take place. They also agreed with Ofsted (2013) and Baltchford et al. (2003) that there was a lack of group work in the English classroom.

RQ4 Can the teaching of explicit talk for learning collaboration improve student independence and understanding?

In terms of understanding, students felt that they owned their knowledge a bit more, that their opinion mattered in a body of other knowledge and helped towards constructing understanding. In research diaries and through discussion, teachers and students reported on the increased audibility of the 'penny dropping'! Although this is only very anecdotal evidence, hearing students reach this point with only other students to help them, was extremely gratifying and once reached, the students were spurred on to develop their own theories, ideas or propose suggestions to the group. This ownership of the knowledge ties into ideas about student being integral to the construction of their own knowledge. Tolmie et al. (2010), Gillies and Khan (2008), Mercer and Littleton (2007) and Howe (2009); and theorists such as Vygotsky (1978), are all supported by teachers reporting that students were involved in constructing their own knowledge together and that they were able to achieve more together than they were alone. Gaining motivation to continue to build on what they were learning is something found by Zimmerman (2008).

Confidence was also another element of independence. There was one particular student who pre-intervention would approach the teacher for validation multiple times in the lesson, would rarely put her hand up preferring whispered questions to the teacher one to one. By the end of the intervention, this student was taking leading roles in directing discussion and her voice was far more audible. She became more confident in her ability to express her ideas and more confident that she had fully grasped the task in the first place. She was also performing in front of the class and reading aloud, something she professed to hate many times before intervention. Although examination data was not part of this study, it was interesting to note that pre-intervention this student scored an average 60% in her pre-intervention comprehension test and a high 96% after intervention on a similar prose

comprehension exam. This supports Cummins (2012), Palinscar (2003) and Wolf et al. (2005) who all found that improved classroom talk lead to improved comprehension.

The development of social benefits was more mixed. For some groups, social issues continued to mar the behavior and progress of developing good talk. In particular, the low ability predominantly EAL group struggled to overcome some of their cultural expectations about working in mixed gender groups. This group were predominantly boys and there was a certain amount of machismo demonstrated that included the teasing of other boys and difficulty in valuing and respecting everybody's opinions. Contrasted to this, another intervention group from the same year group made enormous progress in their social interactions and inclusivity. Although the bottom set did improve, this confirmed the Department's feeling that low ability sets are not as useful in raising the development of language, the attainment and the social skills of EAL and SEN students. This does not quite refute the work of Conteh, Kumar and Beddow (2008) as their observations were taken from larger class sizes in Bradford with a range of abilities compared to our small class sizes in a semi-selective school.

The teachers also reported that co-constructed understanding - students actively engaging in developing and constructing their own ideas and understanding and self-mediating their understanding through discussion - was emerging towards the end of the intervention. This supports findings from Beck et al. (1997); Wegerif, et al. (1999) and Weinberger et al. (2007) amongst others who all cite the development of understanding and agency through quality talk for learning.

VALIDITY/ limitations

As Barnes (2008) quite rightly states 'The very presence of a researcher with a tape recorder encourages young people to put on a show' (p. 7). This was found to be true when some students behaved differently due to my role as HOD and the researcher. However, this

is not necessarily a limitation as the process was intended to make explicit the way students use their talk and how they can use their talk through questions, listening, turn-taking and encouraging inclusivity. Therefore, when I observed other teachers' lessons, this became part of the explicit process and students were consciously using the techniques they had been asked to use to show off. This in itself helped to achieve the goal. Where the limitation came is whether or not this led to them using talk independently away from the teacher or researchers' ears. Teacher observation and the pace and work produced suggested that most continued along the same vein even when not observed directly.

The research journals also created some tensions. Some teachers were self-conscious about handing in notes wanting to have 'done a good job' or embarrassed about what they wrote. Some lacked confidence in their interpretations or what they were recording. The researcher did not ask for typed up notes and assured participants that works of prose were not required. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and they knew that excerpts would be used in the final thesis. Furthermore, the notes were not accurate and verbatim transcriptions but teachers' records of what students said and the sense they made of the conversation rendered into grammatical form. As a full time teacher and working with a Department of full time teachers, it was not possible to record and transcribe each teachers' recordings of their talk lessons over two terms with an intervention group. Therefore, the data is necessarily interpretive and although at times it was possible to combine the teachers' notes with my own observation notes of a session; thus achieving triangulation and as such some validation (Altrichter et al., 2008); much of the raw data is subjective recordings in note form.

Further, there were enormous variations between the details and quality of the research journals and teachers' notes ranging from one teacher's scant notes to fully typed up pages and ongoing streams of notes and observations from lessons. Thus the findings relied

heavily on the journals of five teachers (including the researcher) intermittent notes from the remaining three and the lesson observations undertaken by the researcher. To develop the research further, a more precise structure may be needed to ensure at least some consistency in the observation data supplied by participant teachers.

One of the biggest limitations was that of time. It was difficult to find time to observe the intervention groups as much as I would like. It was also difficult to find enough time for talk lessons with curriculum and assessment constraints. These two limitations became increasingly true as the year progresses and time was taken with assessments, reporting and whole school events, squeezing curriculum time and making it difficult to find time for observations and to deliver talk lessons. Ideally, this is something that needs to be done over a whole academic year or more in order to see a real curve of development.

Conclusions

Talk for learning goes beyond a useful teaching tool in terms of developing effective group work. Its benefits are far reaching and lead to deep learning and independence. It can develop social interactions and mutual respect and trust amongst students, it develops internal schema for students to access when working alone; it builds confidence in EAL learners not to mention vocabulary and the opportunity to try out language in a less public environment; it enables students to experiment with ideas and opinions before presenting them to a wider audience; it also helps to scaffold ideas and creativity for writing away from the daunting prospect of filling the blank page.

In this study, taking a Departmental focus helped to pin a methodology to a developing curriculum, it also served to bring together a range of views within the Department and unite a diverse group of teachers around a common goal. Finally, the benefits of explicitly teaching the use of good talk for learning techniques had an impact on all the learners involved in the target groups. At a minimum the study shifted the teaching and

learning focus of the department onto the value of talk in the classroom and its ability to shape learning, aid language acquisition, scaffold writing tasks, enable meaningful discussion and develop independence.

Talk for Learning is not so much about explicitly teaching students how to talk but more about teaching them how to think (Barnes, 1971; Mercer and Dawes, 2008). By thinking aloud and co-thinking, students are able to build on their existing knowledge and reach new understanding through the medium of teachers' explicit teaching of talk.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Sample minutes of meetings with teacher participants.

Appendix 2 Questions to guide student interviews

Appendix 3 Samples of teacher participants' field notes

Appendix 4 Example research journal sent to participants

Appendix 5 Example talk rules and instructions

Appendix 6 Sample Class rules for intervention groups

Appendix 1 Sample minutes of meetings with teacher participants

don't like somebody
don't work well together
lazy
can't be bothered to contribute.

leader in the group.
doesn't always work. Some
great @ talking control.

Emireh' boys partic bed @
talking to each other

be rigid about what
they need to talk about

not good at being collected
rephrasing breaking it down
get stuck.

younger ones are better +
see anything comes into
their mind
go for it. Too much to say

Often get side tracked
interesting + intellectual
follow-on lines of enquiry
diffic. to know how much to
encourage that

Appendix 2 Questions to guide student interviews

Can you describe what it is like when you get into groups?

Do you prefer it if you choose your groups or the teacher does? Why?

What is good about talking in pairs or groups?

Do you find anything difficult about group work? What?

Do you always contribute to the discussion?

Is there anything annoying about talking in groups?

What do you think good talk in groups should be like?

Does your talk always look like that?

What goes wrong?

Why do you think it goes wrong?

What do you think would make it better?

Is it better or more helpful if there is a teacher sat with your group?

What does bad group talk look like?

Is your talk ever like this?

What do you think you learn from working in groups?

What is the point of talking with other students?

Appendix 3 Samples of teacher participants' field notes

T2 Y6 Session 1

There was mixed success for group work. The students collaborated and talked to set the rules which were then agreed with the class.

Students working with support:

1 group demonstrated clear ability to listen and take on board others' ideas and to try to work together but it call and response type interaction

S1 Why don't we start with an -ed word?

S2 Yeah, what about mesmerized?

S3 Ohh that's a good one, mesmerized I...

S2 walked through the bustling crowd

T What word could you use here that you mentioned in the warm up?

S2 Ooh...boisterous

S3 Yeah I like that...bustling boisterous crowd

S2 What about improved 'walked'?

S2 S4 what do you think?

S4 Erm...maybe 'wandered'

S3 that's good, let's put that

S2 took on a leadership role and encouraged contributions from everyone.

It might be interesting to study the effects on self-esteem in these kinds of interactions.

(Thus go has to sell pizza in a fashion magazine using a rabbit as a wild card.)

① Justify to me why you are promoting weight loss.

Joe: B/c people wants to be thin & go to a fashion magazine for tips. So we have used it to create a fitness pizza.

Rob: Everyone wants to be thin. So we have a fitness pizza.

Sas to Jack - put logo bottom right corner.

Jack - Slogan - "fitness pizza to dance away your belly." These people are interested in fashion and looks. People will still want to look like models & fashion designers

Sas: We are using the bunny

Jack: Bunnies are normally chubby..

Sas: I think it's BTE ... because

Jack: It's saying it's normal to be chubby

Jack: It might not be ethical to promote weight loss but it won't go away. Advertisers don't care about that sort of thing. They still want to sell their products and this is what will sell them.

T5 Session 2

Students in groups of 4 given an extract of Egeus' speech and have to decide what the key words are and what they mean before creating gestures to go with them in a choral speaking action exercise.

One group worked very well together but there were still few reasons give for decisions and one person's authority was accepted over others.

G1 So you kneel

B2 And then like

B1 And we're all standing up

G3 tries to intervene with suggestion

G1 then some go down and some go up

T intervenes ideas are great but you need to give reasons teacher then models the conversation they just had with reasons added

The interchange continues as before but still with no reasons.

G4 We could do it so that

G5 You in the middle and these two at the side

B7 Then me and Fatima at the back then we go down and swap

G9 Could we make it more (unheard)

G5 No, no, no we...

In another group

B6 *So how do you install...?*

Conversation off task about computers between 2 dominant pupils. Other three pupils stood waiting for them to finish and not much else going on.

T intervened

T by being off task you have left these three waiting and we will perform in a minute and they will be embarrassed

B5 *But miss, all ours are too difficult to act*

T explains and models how they can build actions into these lines group then stay on task

Reflection and review time is given at the end of the lesson and T highlights how each of the groups kept to the talk rule (or didn't as the case may be) and also reviewed how that affected the quality of what they produced. The performance element (task design) was really good for highlighting this as the group most on task and keeping to the rules produced the best performance.

Appendix 4 Example Research journal sent to teacher participants

Observation 2

Rules have been pinned around the classroom and T reminded students of the rules before putting them into groups. Students were given a poetry comprehension task with questions to answer.

G1 Love and hate yeah

B1 They're opposites

G3 hate

G1 yeah but then

G3 The...you can love and hate

G1 Yeah but also like...

B1 okay so say love and hate (*they write the answer to question 1 on their own*)

Appendix 5 Example talk rules and instructions

Time to get things moving

1. Make your own notes recording the quality of their talk.
2. Write down examples of things they say (that are good or bad) but show how they talk together and learn together
3. Have a lesson where you make the rules of talk together with your class (see below for some guidance taken from my research)
4. Put the rules up in your classroom
5. Every time you then have talk in your lesson refer to the rules and intervene to make sure that they are giving reasons to back up their talk – they are helping each other to learn by justifying what they say.
“I think that Kensuke
6. If appropriate – make a tool to help (lolly sticks with question starters/ dice/ whiteboards) etc
7. Keep recording examples of the talk to record if the intervention is working
8. Keep inviting me to observe talk lessons

Based on Alexander (2004) and Mercer (2000) Guiding Principles of Talk

- Talk one at a time
- Give reasons to explain our ideas
- Listen to each other
- Respect each other’s ideas
- Listen carefully
- Ask if you don’t understand
- Think about what is being said
- Try to reach agreement

Appendix 6 Sample Class rules for intervention groups

SHARE IDEAS /THINK TOGETHER
INCLUDE EVERYONE IN THE CONVERSATION
GIVE REASONS /GIVE ALTERNATIVES /ASK FOR
EXPLANATIONS/ ASK QUESTIONS IF YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND
EQUAL PARTICIPATION
STAY ON TASK – DON'T GO OFF THE SUBJECT
STAY FOCUSED.
LISTENING TO EACH OTHER
DIVIDE TASKS EQUALLY /USE PEOPLES'
STRENGTHS
REACH A SHARED AGREEMENT /COMPROMISE
TALK ONE AT A TIME
RESPECT EACH OTHERS' IDEAS
THINK

WE DON'T INTERRUPT
WE KEEP EYE CONTACT
WE USE A CLEAR SLOW VOICE
WE RESPOND APPROPRIATELY
WE USE A PLEASANT TONE
WE INVITE EVERYONE INTO THE
CONVERSATION
IF THERE IS SILENCE WE USE THE SENTENCE
OPENERS
WE FOLLOW WHAT IS BEING SAID IN LONG
CONVERSATIONS
WE SPEAK IN FULL SENTENCES AND USE THE
CORRECT WORDS
WE CAN CORRECT EACH OTHER IN A KIND
WAY
IF SOMEONE IS STUCK WE HELP THEM PUT
ACROSS THEIR POV
WE SAY ALOUD THE PUNCTUATION WHEN
USING TALK FOR WRITING

RESPECT IDEAS OF OTHERS
GIVE REASONS FOR OPINIONS
LISTEN TO EACH OTHER
BUILD ON IDEAS OF OTHERS
ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION
ASK EACH OTHER QUESTIONS
ASK FOR REASONS
INCLUDE EVERYONE
REACH A CONSENSUS?
NO RIGHT ANSWER

WHOLE GROUP IS
RESPONSIBLE
SHARE IDEAS
GIVE REASONS
ASK FOR REASONS
REACH AN AGREEMENT

TAKE TURNS—ONE PERSON CAN
SPEAK AT A TIME
ALWAYS LISTEN WHEN SOMEONE
IS TALKING
EVERYONE'S IDEAS AND
OPINIONS ARE ALLOWED
THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A
WRONG ANSWER
IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND
ALWAYS ASK THE SPEAKER TO
EXPLAIN
TRY TO SHOW YOU ARE
LISTENING BY ASKING THE
SPEAKER A QUESTION ABOUT
WHAT THEY HAVE SAID

TALK MUST BE IN
ENGLISH
BE QUIET WHEN
SOMEONE ELSE IS
TALKING
BE RESPECTFUL
LISTEN TO EACH OTHER
FOLLOW THE
CHAIRPERSON