

## **1. What is Dialogic teaching?**

Dialogic teaching harnesses the power of talk to stimulate and extend pupils' thinking and advance their learning and understanding. Dialogic teaching pays as much attention to the teacher's talk as to the pupil's. Dialogic teaching is grounded in research on the relationship between language, learning, thinking and understanding, and in observational evidence on what makes for good learning and teaching.

## **2. Is it a method of teaching?**

No. Dialogic teaching is not a single set method of teaching. Dialogic teaching is an approach and a professional outlook rather than a specific method. It is concerned not only with the techniques we use but also the classroom relationships we foster, the balance of power between teacher and taught and the way we conceive knowledge.

## **3. What does it look like in practise?**

In dialogic classrooms children don't just provide brief factual answers to 'test' or 'recall' questions, or merely spot the answer which they think the teacher wants to hear. Instead they learn and are encouraged to:

- narrate
- explain
- analyse
- speculate
- imagine
- explore
- evaluate
- discuss
- argue
- justify
- ask questions of their own

In learning, as in life, all these forms of talk are necessary. To facilitate the different kinds of learning talk, children in dialogic classrooms also:

- Listen
- Think about what they hear
- Give others time to think
- Respect alternative viewpoints

Many of the teachers in the dialogic teaching development projects have negotiated ground-rules for talk along the lines above, and these are frequently reviewed with the pupils. In dialogic classrooms teachers consciously use discussion and scaffolded dialogue, as well as the other kinds of teacher talk.

#### **4. What do you mean by ‘scaffolded dialogue’?**

Discussion entails the open exchange of views and information in order to explore issues, test ideas and tackle problems. It can be led by one person (the teacher or a pupil), or it can be undertaken by the group collectively. *Scaffolded dialogue involves:*

- **Interactions** which encourage children to think, and to think in different ways
- **Questions** which require much more than simple recall
- **Answers** which are followed up and built on rather than merely received
- **Feedback** which informs and leads thinking forward as well as encourages
- **Contributions** which are extended rather than fragmented
- **Exchanges** which chain together into coherent and deepening lines of enquiry
- **Classroom organisation, climate and relationships** which make all this possible.

Again, all of these have their place: no one form of interaction on its own will suffice for the varied purposes, content and contexts of a modern curriculum.

## 5. Do you have to organise the class in a particular way for dialogic teaching?

In dialogic classrooms teachers exploit the potential of five main ways of organising interaction in order to maximise the prospects for dialogue:

- Whole class teaching
- Group work (teacher-led)
- Group work (pupil-led)
- One-to-one (teacher and pupil)
- One-to-one (pupil pairs)

Again, all of these have their place: no one form of interaction on its own will suffice for the varied purposes, content and contexts of a modern curriculum.

## 6. What are the principles of dialogic teaching?

Whatever kinds of teaching and learning talk are on offer, and however the interaction is organised, teaching is more likely to be dialogic if it is:

**Collective-** *Participants address learning tasks together.*

**Reciprocal-** *Participants listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints.*

**Supportive-** *Pupils express their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers, and they help each other to reach common understandings.*

**Cumulative-** *Participants build on answers and other oral contributions and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and understanding.*

**Purposeful-** *Classroom talk, though open and dialogic, is also planned and structured with specific learning goals in view.*

### **Two Final Thoughts**

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

(Mikhail Bakhtin).

*'What ultimately counts is the extent to which teaching requires pupils to think, not just report someone else's thinking'*

(adapted from Martin Nystrand et al (1997))

### **Find out more**

These notes were produced by the PDST for the L1 English & Literacy day for teachers of English in 2013. They are adapted from Robin Alexander, Towards Dialogic Teaching (4th edition, 2008, York: Dialogos).

See: [www.robinalexander.org.uk/dialogic-teaching](http://www.robinalexander.org.uk/dialogic-teaching)

See: [www.pdst.ie/node/2529](http://www.pdst.ie/node/2529)