

Annie Fisher

afisher@marjon.ac.uk

An investigation into postgraduate trainee teachers' beliefs about the role of dialogue in teaching and learning: fostering 'reflection and reciprocity' through modelling.

Academic biography

Annie Fisher is Senior Lecturer in Primary Literacy, and Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator for the School of Education and Professional Development at UCP Marjon. Her research interests include collaborative work with Dr Linda Rush of Liverpool Hope University on 'Learning to Learn' approaches in ITT; this culminated in the presentation of a paper at the BERA conference in 2007, and a related publication in the Curriculum Journal. Her Doctoral research focuses on the place of dialogic talk in developing many-voiced, rather than monologic, classrooms.

Abstract

The rationale for this research is a belief, based on observation of teaching practice, and learning behaviour in sessions, that primary postgraduate student teachers may tend to position themselves as receptors and transmitters of knowledge, rather than active users, and promoters, of dialogue for cognition. A year-long action research project was undertaken with a group of self-selecting students drawn from a larger purposive sample, to determine if they were able to articulate the way in which they could alter their practice by actively promoting dialogue. To this end, the Learning to Learn (Claxton, 2006; Campaign for Learning, 2003) strategies of 'reflection' and 'reciprocity' were explicitly modelled in taught English sessions at university. The study suggests that, although the taught English course did encourage students to use practical strategies for promoting dialogue, for most, the realities of the school climate were paramount. Generally students' belief sets remained largely unaltered, despite an espoused wish to 'improve' their practice. It seems clear that to address this, the university must take more seriously its role as the dialogic space.

Key words: dialogue; learning to learn; modelling, reciprocity; reflection

Introduction

As an experienced educator (university tutor, teacher as researcher, and researcher as teacher), it had become apparent to me that postgraduate students do not always see a value in the use of dialogue as a tool for developing learning *per se*. Interaction in taught sessions at university indicates that, often, the role of an ITT (Initial Teacher Training) course is seen as a means of answering questions relating to curriculum content and delivery, and classroom organisation, with 'real learning' taking place during teaching practice (Fisher & Rush, 2008). I speculated that this lack of critical engagement might be the result of both a tentative understanding of role of talk for learning, and the complexity of coming to terms with the curriculum for English; the simple reason, however, might be that the shortness of a one-year course leads to a wish to be 'told', rather than engage in speculative dialogue, pose tentative thoughts, and slow down the sense of being certain and moving on.

This paper examines a number of issues. Firstly, it discusses the importance of student teachers seeing the value of dialogic interaction in primary classrooms, being able to use it, talk about it and want to use it in their own classrooms. Secondly, if we accept the former as important, what is the best way to make sure that this happens in a course taught at university: is using dialogue as a lecturer, and modelling the process, sufficient, or is there more to it? Thirdly, how do we address the problem of the tension between what students are taught in a course, what they bring with them epistemologically, and what they see and experience on teaching practice? It is hoped that some understanding of these factors may lead to an understanding of what supports or constrains their capacity for making epistemological or pedagogical changes; being able to theorise these, and being willing to take up transformational pedagogies.

Examining pedagogical and epistemological factors

The link between epistemological change and transformations in learning is examined by Moon (2004) who suggests that critical thinking is inextricably intertwined with epistemological development: the learner's view of the nature of knowledge. Smith (2005) suggests that a multiplicity of factors impact upon these assumptions, including intuitive theories; personal constructs; the reality of managing teaching and learning in the classroom, and the influence of the school culture. If Maslow's 'Hierarchy of needs' is applied to the postgraduate student experience, it could be assumed that initially they are operating at a level of physiological need which leads to replication of observed practice, and to default to a 'safe' (i.e. traditional) model of didactic teaching. In a short course, students might not have time to reach Maslow's fifth level: forming and implementing personal beliefs. According to Brownlee (2003:87), students at an early stage of epistemological development tend towards silence; if pedagogic knowledge is viewed as absolute, and university tutors as the authoritative transmitters of that knowledge, this would constitute a powerful reason for undervaluing dialogue as a means of mutually constructing understanding.

The nature of the postgraduate course brings together student teachers with a wide range of prior experience; as a consequence, it would be a mistaken assumption that they could all be positioned as naïve learners. It is, perhaps more realistic to situate them at different points on a continuum somewhere between Brownlee's 'received knowing' and 'constructed knowing', and Baxter Magolda's (1993) 'absolute knowing' and 'contextual knowing'. The most sophisticated stage of the continuum represents an understanding that 'knowing' is contradictory, ephemeral and subject to constant construction and reconstruction. Epistemological beliefs and learning, according to Schommer (1994:295), are inextricably connected and determine how far an individual is able to manage

uncertainty when faced with demanding concepts, tasks and requests for a personal view. This might link with Stevens *et al.*'s (2006) report of seemingly paradoxical changes in the epistemology of secondary trainees during the course; for example in a move towards more confident classroom management, but a loss of creativity.

Recent research into transformations in learning and teaching in ITT (Stevens *et al.*, 2006) suggests attention needs to be paid to the way English is taught at university. They posit that insufficient work has been done in examining pedagogical approaches, and identifying what modes of assessment and feedback are considered to be the most useful. Key findings from a number of projects (Smith, 2005; Stevens *et al.*, 2006; Kahn, 2006) indicate that, by the end of their course, many student teachers do begin to perceive that the best learning takes place in an equal learning partnership with the tutor. There are clear links here to the role of critical literacy (Johnson and Freedman, 2005; McDonald, 2004; Smith, 2004) and dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2008) in which children (and students) are encouraged to pose questions of each other, and where questions raised by the 'adult' are genuine questions, i.e. those to which an answer is not known. There are connections too with Mercer and Littleton's work on exploratory talk (2007). For student teachers to be empowered to move from absolutist beliefs to challenge the 'experts', we need to create a 'risk-taking' environment; a student who does not feel able to engage in this way at university is unlikely to create such conditions in their own classroom

Conceptualising pedagogic change

There appears to be a convincing case for a change in pedagogic approaches, both in primary classrooms, and in the university setting, and at this point I turn to the recent growth of interest in approaches referred to as 'Learning to Learn' (L2L) which, for the purpose of this enquiry, is taken to mean a family of learning practices

that enhance one's capacity to learn (Hargreaves, 2005). Rawson (2000) and Higgins and Leat (2006:5) argue that classroom practitioners have moved beyond a 'skill set' mentality, now believing that the ability to engage actively in learning through "debate, questioning and discussion" is paramount. This indicates that classroom dialogue has changed significantly since Barnes' (1976) study which reported that teaching and learning was characterised by teachers transmitting knowledge to pupils, and a lack of opportunity for learners to take a greater part in forming their own knowledge. Current research into the use of dialogue in the primary classroom, (for example, Alexander, 2008; Mercer, 2000, 1995; Myhill, 2004; Skidmore, 2003; Smith, 2004; Wragg and Brown, 2001), however, indicates that talk remains teacher-dominated, focussing upon question-answer routines which close down opportunities for speculation and cognitive growth. They highlight also teachers' failure to use answers as the fulcrum of the learning exchange. If the teachers observed did not appear to understand, or value, dialogue, then perhaps we should question how far dialogue was used in their *own* learning, not least within higher education. It seems that, whilst there is not a general agreement about what might constitute a theory of epistemology, there is consensus that it impacts on the ability of student teachers to engage with critical enquiry; I would argue that this, in turn shapes the pedagogical practices they are likely to adopt within their own classrooms,

In order to develop an understanding of the potential of dialogue, and to heed Stevens *et al.*'s (2006) call for different methods of teaching, I decided to reshape the pedagogy of the postgraduate ITT English course at UCP Marjon. Previously, teaching had focused on developing an understanding of higher order questioning; however, it had become apparent that this was not sufficient. Student teachers need to understand the role that *dialogue*, rather than questioning, plays in developing learning, and how to extend this through promoting peer interaction, child-initiated questioning, wait time, and probing to extend answers. The pedagogical shift

was based on teaching approaches designed to make visible to the student teachers how the use of dialogue works; how it is theoretically grounded, and how they might (potentially) use it to support literacy learning in the primary classroom. These approaches were drawn firstly from Alexander's (2008) work on dialogic teaching which emphasises the reciprocal and cumulative nature of dialogue which fosters thinking aloud as a means of allowing pupils (and students) to develop their ideas at greater length. Alexander suggests this sort of talk should be seen as an important goal of education, since competence in Oracy contributes to competence in literacy

Secondly, it drew on 'Learning to Learn' strategies suggested by Claxton (2006) and the Campaign for Learning (2003). Claxton (2006) argues powerfully that asking questions is a risky business: however, he believes that the capacity, and disposition, to learn depends, to a certain extent, on a willingness to take that risk. He suggests four positive learning dispositions (four Rs); these include reciprocity – the ability to work collaboratively, to be open to feedback, to be attentive and empathetic; and reflectiveness – to be thoughtful, self-evaluative and self-knowing. Teachers (and tutors) who promote positive learning dispositions are not afraid to say "I don't know" or "Could you explain that again, I don't get it" or "that's a good question: I've never thought of that". The Campaign for Learning's 5Rs of Lifelong Learning also includes 'reflectiveness', defined as the ability to ask questions, observe, see patterns, experiment and evaluate learning.

All taught English sessions at the university therefore foregrounded the theoretical base for explicit modelling of the following strategies:

- sharing the enquiry with students;
- using the vocabulary of learning (reciprocity, reflectiveness)
- encouraging peer discussion without tutor intervention

- asking exploratory questions designed to move learners forward;
- learning aloud and responding to the unexpected with curiosity.

To address the overarching question of what supports or constrains student teachers' capacity for making epistemological or pedagogical changes; being able to theorise these, and being willing to take up transformational pedagogies, the following key questions were posed:

- How might postgraduate trainees articulate their beliefs regarding the value of talk for learning (dialogue) at the start of the course?
- Would this belief have changed after the taught course was completed?
- Could trainees articulate what, if any, features of the taught English course had led to a change?
- *Might this lead to more confidence in developing a dialogic approach on their final teaching practice?*

The paper explores shifts in students' ways of self-reporting their epistemological stances; their understanding of learning to learn/dialogic approaches; and how they used (or would use) these, and if there was a shift in their pedagogy. I do not intend to explore, within the scope of this study, more than a general picture of the nature of the revised university sessions, or to present a detailed analysis of what student teachers actually *did* in their final teaching practice. There is, therefore, potential for further research which analyses closely the revised pedagogy, and the relationship between what actually happens in the classroom, including the university course, and how the learning to learn approaches were put into action. This would address the final key question above which relates to student teacher confidence.

Methodology

A year-long action research project was undertaken to draw together the key questions relating to developing beliefs, the role played in this development by taught English sessions, and the way that this impacted on student teachers' practice. Literature (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Denscombe, 2003; Schwandt, 1997) views action research as an interrelated process of improving and understanding practice beyond teachers' everyday actions, and involving a theoretical base which helps to address the problem of transferability. As Zuber-Skerritt (1996) posits, in practical action research, the researcher's role is to foster practical deliberation and self-reflection, and it was hoped that the process would enable collaborative and critical learning to take place at all levels. The interdependence of students and academic researcher thus offer a different model of professional development from the government prescription of 'best practice'; the primary outcome of the research was, therefore, hoped to be a growth in personal understanding and development of pedagogy for all concerned. As Grundy and Kemmis (1988:7) suggest, all "actors" in action research are equal. 'Equality' may be an ethically contested notion where students are dependent on a tutor for the ultimate award of QTS (Qualified Teacher Status); to this end, an appropriate principle of action (Pring, 2000) was to ensure I did not act as a teaching practice supervisor for any of the participants.

Two research tools were selected for data collection: firstly, questionnaires, designed to identify a purposive sample of student teachers; secondly, following informal discussion to invite participants to self-select from the original sample, group interviews explored the beliefs and values of participants more explicitly. Many sources (for example, Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Denscombe, 2003; Munn and Dreever, 1990; Scott and Morrison, 2006; Scott and Usher, 1999) warn of tensions between allowing more thought to be given to the language of the questionnaire at the expense of divorcing responses from the social context. The group interviews, therefore,

were designed to allow participants to discuss and explore their views of dialogue more freely. With the student teachers' informed consent, video and audio data were collected during the group interviews and transcribed verbatim. A phenomenographic approach (Akerlind, 2005; Denscombe, 2003) focusing on subjectivity, description and interpretation of perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, was used in the process of data analysis. An 'outcome space' (Akerlind, 2005:322) was sought through presenting categories of meaning arising from the data in relationship to one another. Structural relationships were established through iterative sorting and re-sorting of utterances. Meanings were then contextualised within each separate transcript, and between transcripts. Reliability was sought through a careful explanation of the step-by-step approach taken to interpretation and analysis of my presuppositions.

The inevitable influence of my ontology and expectations on the collection and interpretation of data is fully acknowledged, and it is not claimed that this purposive sampling is representative of a wider postgraduate population. Since the final outcome inevitably reflects my interpretational judgement, validity could be described as 'pragmatic', rather than communicative (Sandberg, 1994, in Akerlind, 2005) in its insight into teaching and learning. The limitations notwithstanding, the research process led to a more informed understanding of ways in which the university course might be modified.

Data collection

Questionnaires

An informal questionnaire was issued to all student teachers at the start of their first taught English session. Five open questions sought to identify those who mentioned talk as an enjoyable strand of English. It was assumed a longlist of participants could be drawn up at this stage; however, of eighty respondents none mentioned talk, discussion, dialogue or debate, despite the wealth of informative writing. Following this unexpected complication, a second stage of identification took place. Before the course commenced, students had completed a lengthy 'Learning to Learn' questionnaire (James *et al.*, 2001) for their professional studies programme. Ten of these questions related, I believed, to dispositions towards talk: for example, Q 56 asked for a response to the statement 'In English, people who collaborate learn more than those who work individually'. Accordingly I drew up a purposive longlist comprising students whose L2L questionnaire responses appeared to show such a positive disposition. Following discussion and invitation to participate in the project, ten students, representing a wide range of age, gender, previous academic qualifications and experience, self-selected from the larger group. The ten comprised five male and five female students aged between 26 and 49. Their degrees included law, psychology, philosophy, history of art, anthropology and media, and they represented a spread of curriculum specialisms including modern foreign languages, humanities and English. The initial questionnaires for the sample group were re-examined after self-selection from the larger purposive sample. The questions probed memories of being taught English, favourable or otherwise; aspects of English they were looking forward to, or apprehensive about, teaching; what they were hoping to gain from the English element of the ITT course at university. An overview is presented in Fig 1 below:

	What aspect of English do you remember enjoying most at primary school? Why?	What aspect did you most dislike, or find worrying? Why?	What are you most looking forward to teaching	If there is any aspect you are worried about teaching, what is it?	What do you hope to gain in particular from the English course?
Simon	Creative writing. Allowed you to open your mind without being told it was wrong	Spelling	Reading: it can open a whole world	spelling	Making English an exciting subject to teach and learn
Peter	Having a famous author who made the book come alive	Spelling tests	How to love reading as much as I do	phonics	Confidence in teaching English
Ann	Reading to myself to develop characters in my head	Comprehension – so black and white Reading aloud	Reading and creative writing	grammar	Better understanding of curriculum content and how to deliver it
Steve	Hot-seating and role play	Group reading; missed out on what was happening	Reading and discovering individual preferences	none	Effective ways to encourage all abilities to continually improve
Katie	Spelling; learning new words and escaping into reading	Shared reading – made it harder to form own images	All of it	Complex grammar	How to break areas down for effective teaching
Kay	Flashcards. Reading for pleasure	Spelling tests dictation Comprehension Writing with no direction	Exciting children about books helping them discover the richness of language	Teaching SEN children at the correct level	Tips and techniques for engaging and helping children with spelling and writing
Amy	Writing a daily diary	punctuation	Story writing, spelling	Punctuation: I would like to make it fun	Ways to make English interesting
Maeve	Devouring books; the excitement of finding a new book by a favourite author	Grammar Writing ‘what I did in the holidays’	Exciting children about reading	Rules of grammar drama	Fill the gaps in my knowledge , particularly in creative writing
Lewis	Poetry reading and writing; exploring meaning and the freedom of the language	Copying from the board	Exploring creative uses of words	Seeing some children fall behind and lose confidence	Ways to stimulate children to enjoy writing creatively and express their feelings
Ben	Almost nothing	Being assessed; being punished for joining my writing	Creative writing. I love storytelling	none	Inspiration ; ideas for how to teach literacy

Fig 1: The focus group’s response to English questionnaire

The Learning to Learn Questionnaire

Responses to the 'Learning to Learn' questionnaire are presented below in order to show the overall pattern of answers.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
19 Learning is about absorbing information				Lewis	Ben		Steve Kay Peter	Amy Simon Maeve Katie Ann	19 Learning is about developing ideas
30 Good learners are able to explain their ideas to other people	Maeve	Peter Ben	Kay Annie		Steve	Simon Katie	Lewis	Amy	30 you can be a good learner without being able to explain your ideas to other people
31 the best way to learn something is to try to work it out for yourself	Kay	Maeve Ben Steve Ann	Katie	Amy Peter Lewis Simon					31 the best way to learn something is to get help from someone else
32 It's better to ask interesting questions than to give the right answers	Amy Peter Maeve	Ben Steve	Kay Simon Kelly	Lewis				Ann	32 It's better to give the right answers than ask interesting questions
39 In the classroom, good learners don't criticize ideas		Amy		Lewis	Steve Kay Katie	Simon Ann	Maeve Peter	Ben	39 In the classroom, good learners criticize ideas
40 with pupils, it's more important to explain right answers than explore wrong ones		Amy		Steve Lewis Katie		Ben Ann	Peter Maeve Simon	Kay	40 with pupils, it's more important to explore wrong answers than explain right ones
56 In English, pupils who collaborate learn more than those who work individually	Ann	Amy Peter Steve	Kay Ben Katie	Maeve Lewis Simon					56 In English, pupils who collaborate learn less
57 In maths pupils who collaborate learn more than those who work individually	Ann	Amy Peter Steve	Kay Simon Katie	Maeve Ben Lewis					57 In maths, pupils who collaborate learn less
58 In science pupils who collaborate learn more than those who work individually	Ann	Amy Peter Steve Ben Katie	Kay Simon	Lewis Maeve					58 In science pupils who collaborate learn less
59 In general, pupils learn a great deal from working with each other	Peter Katie Ann	Steve Simon Ben Amy	Kay	Maeve Lewis					59 In general, pupils learn very little from working with each other

Fig 2: responses extracted from the adapted L2L questionnaire

(James et al. (2001) ESRC: Learning How to Learn in classrooms, schools and networks)

Initial data analysis

Data from the two questionnaires were analysed at a very early stage in the project (September) in order to identify participants. Responses to the English questionnaire indicated that the hopes, fears and aspirations for most of the cohort were well represented by the self-selecting selected group. The gains they hoped to make from the course were mostly pragmatic. For example 'tips and techniques', 'fill[ing] the gaps in subject knowledge', a 'better understanding of curriculum content' and significantly 'how to *deliver* it'; effective teaching was seen as the goal. Only three group members, all male, used words such as enjoyment, inspiration and excitement.

The Learning to Learn questionnaire, however, revealed several contradictions. Although seven of the ten group members indicated a strong belief that learning is about developing ideas (Q 19), they also agreed that the best way to learn something is by yourself (Q 31). Answers to the final four curriculum-orientated questions indicated a belief that pupils who collaborate learn more (Q 56-59); however, a linked question, designed to elicit opinions about 'explaining ideas to others' as a strategy used by good learners (Q30), provided the widest range of responses. Q 32 and Q 40, both of which related to the use of exploratory questioning, indicated that broadly the respondents were inclined to believe that this was a better strategy for developing learning than simply looking for, and explaining, right answers.

Although Q39 about the role of critical response to ideas showed a range of opinion, most participants agreed that this was a feature of good learners. Amy's responses to Q 39 and 40 showed that, alone in the group, she strongly believed that good learners should not criticise ideas, and that it was more important to explain right ideas than explore wrong ones; this was confusing, since her answer to Q 32 showed a strong belief that it is better to ask interesting questions than

to give the right answers. The tentative conclusion was that although the participants were generally well-disposed towards the use of dialogue, their ideas and beliefs were confused and fragmentary at the start of the course.

Interviews

Group interviews were not held until the participants had completed their second teaching practice (March) and were eager to discuss their perceptions of promoting talk in the classroom. The broad areas for discussion were distributed a day before the discussions, and focused on pre-course views about talk; any development of those ideas during the course; links they might make to taught English sessions, and to theoretical underpinning. The methodological basis for this has been examined fully above, therefore, suffice it to reiterate that the interviews were conducted as discussions, with little direct questioning or probing by me.

Phenomenographic data analysis

The interview data were examined using phenomenographic methods (Akerlind, 2005; Cresswell, 2007; Entwistle, 1997) to determine outcome space and relationships between categories. This approach was helpful as it allowed identification of significant statements and themes. It was hoped to provide a clearer picture of what it is to be a postgraduate trainee teacher managing the competing demands of a university course and of teaching practice, regardless of age, experience or gender. This was further managed by:

- focusing on the 'how' and 'what' aspects of the phenomenon;
- Focusing on similarities and differences within and between categories;

- Looking for the implications for *all* of the categories of description of a change in any category.

In English, I very much thought about being a teacher, delivering the text, reading a poem. (Peter)

. After transcription, the raw data were coded into four categories:

1. Initial thoughts about talk;
2. change in belief;
3. influence of English sessions;
4. links with theory.

It soon became apparent that this initial coding was too broad, and these areas were further coded and subdivided into related categories; for example 'Change in belief'

B	Change in belief
b i -	simple statement
b ii -	change based on TP experience
b iii -	emergence of new belief during interview
b iv -	evidence of emerging belief becoming embedded across subjects and outside lessons
b v -	change based on observed practice in school

Fig 3: coding the interview data

Uncovering initial beliefs

Most trainees had never considered talk as a tool for learning. In the main, their beliefs were predicated on personal experience and memories of primary education; classrooms were remembered as silent places where any discussion was tightly controlled, and where all assessment was of written work. Peter's response was typical of both groups who used the language of '*delivery*' and '*disseminating all the knowledge*':

Steve, Maeve and Kay, however, drew on employment-based experience using terms such as 'ownership'. In particular, Kay's experience working with ESL teachers was reflected strongly in her discussion of using pair talk to develop ideas. Role play and hot-seating, the two strategies that were included on the initial questionnaire, were again cited by Ben and Steve, both of whom had a strong belief in the value of talk before joining the course. Alone of the trainees, Ben indicated a theoretical underpinning for his understanding, based on his background in psychology.

Investigating changing epistemologies

The process of teasing out changes in epistemology was complex. The key seemed to relate to validation through practice, although this was difficult to separate from general classroom anecdotes. The school played a pivotal role in confirming, or developing, an understanding of how talk can be used to support learning. For some, this understanding had become embedded in their practice; for others, understanding emerged through discussion during the interviews. All agreed, however, that talk helps children to focus, communicate and clarify understanding. Much of the discussion can be represented by Peter's experience below, in which he articulates the way that observation of a skilled teacher's practice was the key factor in developing an understanding of the teacher's role as discourse guide, rather than knowledge provider:

They just got the children talking...it wasn't teacher led at all. She must have trained them cos they would then go off and have a really good discussion and somebody else would just chip in at the right point and say 'Oh, I don't agree with that. I think perhaps...' (Peter)

The students who had reached a more sophisticated level of understanding, such as Simon, Ann and Lewis, described a growing ability to hand control of the

discussion to the children, to move away from the planning and encourage collaborative learning through discussion, and to embed dialogue in other subjects. Simon, for example, not only learnt to plan for talk, but to move away from his planning when appropriate, *'as my experience has gone on I've been less afraid to kind of...to control the discussion, and get a bit more flexible'*. This was echoed by both Steve and Kay who both reflect a level of comfortableness with uncertainty:

dialogue means...you can go off on a tangent, and that's not just your lesson, and that empowers children if you say you're doing that. I know in my first practice I wouldn't have thought of doing that. I had my plan (Steve)

You've got to not be afraid, cos you're giving up control when you turn it over to discussion, anything could come back and you have to deal with it on your toes, so you have to be more relaxed about where it could go off, away from your plan (Kay)

Lewis, who had stated initially that he had never considered the role of talk for learning, demonstrated a deep level of understanding about the importance of the 'Learning to Learn' strategies 'reflectiveness' and 'reciprocity' in his discussion of the absence of noise required by his placement school:

...art is about communication, and if you're engaged in making a piece of art ... it's absolutely vital to be discussing it and talking and just interacting with others, you know, working in a vacuum like that is terrible. (Lewis)

An emergence of understanding during interview discussion had not been expected, but evidence for this can be found in the following exchange between Ann and Lewis, and the interjection by Ben. This discussion about the significance of sharing learning objectives with children at the start of the lesson develops as a result of the debate about open discussion:

Lewis I'm just trying to formulate an idea about putting up learning objectives... I'm not absolutely sure that I agree with it, the use of them in that way all the time. And I

can't put my finger on exactly why, but it might be something to do with what you've just said (indicates Ann again)

Ann Sometimes you feel like 'this is what we're learning today' and you put it up. There's no intrigue or excitement

Ben Don't you need a framework of where to shove things into as you're learning them?

Identifying the influence of modelling on trainees' beliefs

As previously indicated, this study looks at what the students self-report, not what they do (or aim to do). This section, therefore, looks at shifts in what they indicate their beliefs to be, and how they view what occurred for them in the university course. Noting the strong influence of the practice school, it was tempting to believe that university sessions had no place in developing beliefs or understanding. The interviews showed there *was* an influence, but that this was often associated with a personal or emotional reaction to the strategy modelled. All referred to pragmatic organisational strategies used to encourage talk, and techniques such as jigsawing (creating 'expert' groups with spokespersons). Critical literacy and genuine questioning (Alexander, 2008; Mercer, 2000; Myhill, 2004; Smith, 2004) was also a strong thread of the discussion. In particular, a lengthy exchange between Simon, Ben and Ann (preceding the learning objectives discussion above) speculated how far my teaching strategy of 'open discussion' was just that, or a device for encouraging 'ownership' and cognitive growth. It was also apparent that the *strategies* designed to foster reciprocity and reflectiveness had played an important role in developing beliefs, with several of the group mentioning modelling and a 'role model'. Tutor passion and enthusiasm was another named key factor.

Some of the strongest language used by the group related to personal and emotional response to strategies used in sessions; this appeared to encourage deeper reflection; Ben and Ann both refer to the

'horrors' and 'stress' caused by being asked to participate in group storytelling. The conquering of fear, however, appeared to be a significant factor in influencing practice. Although, for some students, the use of talk for learning was not validated until a class teacher was also seen to use it, several participants discussed the precise way in which taught English sessions impacted on their own practice. Ben summed this up:

You were a role model to me as to how to go about encouraging talk ...so whatever I've perceived has been through watching you talking. (Ben)

The L2L *vocabulary* of reflectiveness and reciprocity was not used by any trainees, however, and this will be discussed further below.

Making links with theory

In attempting to evaluate how far participants were able to make explicit links with a theoretical underpinning, this section is opened with Simon's particularly succinct comment

There's a lot to be said for that, I think, having looked at it from a purely theoretical point of view...and then going into schools and actually seen that value and that growth that can come from those kinds of discussions. (Simon)

This, however, provides a rather deceptive picture. Despite the foregrounding of theory in taught sessions, and explicit links made with a L2L perspective as strategies such as transferring control of the dialogue to the students were modelled, in general only pragmatic reasons for using dialogue were offered: for example: '*It works*' (Kay); '*Speaking in English is being encouraged...you can't do the speaking bit and be quiet*' (Katie) and '*Common sense*' (Peter). No trainees volunteered any aspect of 'Learning to Learn' as part of a belief set, and when prompted maintained a slightly bemused silence. This appears to be significant, since at various points during the sessions the participants found 'memorable', I had stepped outside the role of 'model'

and encouraged focused discussion about the strategies, named them precisely, using The *Campaign for Learning* and Claxton's (2006) vocabulary of 'reciprocity' and reflection, and discussed his model of 'split-screen teaching' in which the teaching focuses equally on content, and the precise learning strategy being practised.

Steve and Amy commented that the best learning happened when children were talking to the teacher since it represented a move away from transmission learning, and Peter assured his group that '*There's good theories behind using speaking*': but failed to mention any. The exception to this was provided by Ben who gave a lengthy explanation of Neisser's *Analysis by Synthesis*. Here, he attempted to explain how he makes sense of the world, returning to the concept later in discussion of how children learn to decode and comprehend through peer discussion. This was completely different in tone, content and level of understanding, to the rest of the group.

Understanding the concerns and priorities of the trainees

At this point it is helpful to return to Smith (2005:212) on the lack of impact of training on practice which, he suggests 'may be more apparent than real'. He argues that in order to change beliefs, trainees need their mentors to "support and praise...in order to reduce cognitive dissonance [and] affect the trainee teachers' sense of self-efficacy". Some were clearly preoccupied with school constraints, perceived as preventing them from using dialogue for cognition. At a basic level, pragmatic problems in 'training' children to discuss were voiced. An unexpected outcome of the interview was that just under half the group expressed a 'fear' of promoting talk in English because it offered fewer certainties than science and maths; this resonates with Stevens *et al.*'s (2006) suggestion that some students fear that knowledge is quantifiable, and held by the teacher. The greatest fear, however, seemed to relate to

school culture, the reactions of older staff to noise and supervisors commenting adversely on lack of control. If these fears are examined against Maslow's hierarchy, then the need for safety, belonging and esteem can clearly be seen driving reciprocal determinism.

Moving towards an understanding of the use of dialogue for cognition

As the trainees reach the end of their taught course, it is hoped that in the light of this investigation, and further practice, that they see the teaching which took place within university, and that which occurs in their classrooms, as interlinked. To return to the key questions, the timing of the interview (after two teaching practices and almost the entire taught course) appeared to have allowed sufficient time for reflection. The student teachers perceived that, based on personal experience, they had not considered the value of talk at all at the start of the course. Clearly there had been a shift in thinking, and they were able to articulate relatively pragmatic reasons for developing a more equal and dialogic pattern of communication; these, however, mainly focussed on the concept of 'ownership'. The practical strategies modelled in the taught English course had provided a model on which to base their own teaching, and offered reassurance that questions could be used for more than factual recall. The final question, '*Might this lead to more confidence in developing a dialogic approach on their final teaching practice?*' remains an open question.

To create Daly's (2004:197) thinking, talking "social place[s] where meanings are forged and where the teacher is also the learner", there needs to be a shift in thinking: as Hinett suggests (2002) trainees need to understand that knowledge is formed through a complex web of social and collaborative interactions between partners. Without that understanding, they may well see knowledge as 'out there', and fixed, and regard dialogue as risky business which is urged (but not practised) at university, but frowned upon by school. Haggis (2003) argues that not all students have the

confidence, skill and motivation to engage in academic debate, and that creating the 'right' learning environment will not develop this; it may be that the problems facing Higher Education in terms of student numbers and pressure of time, paralleled in schools by the perception of the pressure of SATs, tick-boxes and league tables, might mediate against the creation of an environment which supports critical thinking through the time-consuming process of reflection and reciprocity. I would suggest, however, that we may draw learners towards contextual knowing by challenging them beyond what Moon (2004) refers to as a comfort zone of knowing, and that this is best accomplished through discussing, problem-solving and 'dialoguing' in a risk-taking, exploratory atmosphere. The university, therefore, needs to reconsider its place as a dialogic space.

References

- Akerlind, G. (2005) Variation and commonality in phenomenographic research methods. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 24 (4): 321-334.
- Alexander, R.J. (2008) *Towards Dialogic Teaching: rethinking classroom talk*, (4th edn.) York: Dialogos.
- Barnes, D. (1976) *From communication to curriculum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1993) The Convergence of rational and interpersonal knowing in young adults' epistemological development: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association. Atlanta. USA.
- Brownlee, J. (2003) Changes in Primary School Teachers' Beliefs about Knowing: a longitudinal study. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 31 (1): 87 -98.
- Campaign for Learning (2003) <http://www.learntolearn.org/documents/CfLReport4pp.pdf> [accessed on 08/12/08]
<http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learninginschools/l2l/5rs.asp#ref2> accessed on June 6th 2009.
- Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical*. London: Falmer Press.
- Claxton, G. (2006) Expanding the capacity to learn: A new end for education? Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association annual conference Warwick University.

- Cresswell, J. (2007) *Qualitative research design*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Daly, C. (2004) Trainee English teachers and the struggle for subject knowledge. In *Changing English*, 11 (2): 189 - 204.
- Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide (2nd edn.)*. Maidenhead: OUP.
- Entwistle, N. (1997) Introduction: Phenomenography in higher education. In *Higher Education Research and Development*, 16: 125-126.
- Fisher, A. & Rush, L. (2008) Conceptions of learning and pedagogy: developing trainee teachers' epistemological understandings. *The Curriculum Journal*, 19 (3): 227-238.
- Grundy, S. & Kemmis, S. (1988) Educational research in Australia: the state of the art (an overview). In S. Kemmis and R. McTaggart (eds.) *The Action Research Reader*, 3rd edn. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University.
- Haggis, T. (2003) Constructing Images of Ourselves? A Critical Investigation into 'Approaches to Learning' Research in Higher Education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 2 (1): 89 - 104.
- Hargreaves, D. (ed.) (2005) *About Learning: Report of the Learning Working Group*. London: Demos.
- Higgins, S. and Leat, D. (2006) What is learning to learn and how do we know it is happening? Paper presented at the British Educational Research Conference, University of Warwick.
- Hinett, K. (2002) *Improving Learning through reflection in Higher Education*. The Higher Education Academy.
- James, M. William, D. & Southworth, G. (2001-2005) ESRC funded project: Learning How to Learn in classrooms, schools and networks <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/ViewAwardPage.aspx?AwardId=1331> accessed on June 7th 2009.
- Johnson, H. & Freedman, L. (2005) *Developing Critical Awareness at the Middle Level*. International Reading Association: Newark DE.
- Kahn, P. E., Young, R., Grace, S., Pilkington, R., Rush, L., Tomkinson, C. and Willis, I. (2006) *The role and effectiveness of reflective practices in programmes for new academic staff: a grounded practitioner review of the research literature*. York: Higher Education Academy.
- McDonald, L. (2004) Moving from reader response to critical reading: developing 10 – 11 year olds' ability as analytical readers of literary texts. In *Literacy*, 2 (4): 17 – 25.
- Mercer, N. (1995) *The Guided Construction of Knowledge*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Mercer, N. (2000) *Words and Minds*. London: Routledge.
- Mercer, N. & Littleton, K. (2007) *Dialogue and the development of children's thinking*. London: Routledge.
- Moon, J. (2004) *We seek it here: a new perspective on the elusive activity of critical thinking: a theoretical and practical approach*. Bristol: ESCalate.
- Munn, P. & Dreever, E. (1990) *Using Questionnaires in Small-Scale Research*. Edinburgh: SCRE.
- Myhill, D. (2004) Talk, talk, talk: teaching and learning in whole class discourse. In *Research Papers in Education*, 21 (1): 19 - 41.
- Rawson, M. (2000) Learning to Learn: more than a skill set. In *Studies in Higher Education*, 25 (2): 225 - 238.
- Schommer, M. A. (1994) Synthesising epistemological belief research: tentative understandings and provocative confusions. In *Educational Psychology Review*, 85 (3): 293 - 319.
- Schwandt, T. (1997) *Qualitative inquiry*. London: SAGE.
- Scott, D. & Morrison, M. (2006) *Key Ideas in Educational Research*. London: Continuum.
- Scott, D. & Usher, R. (1999) *Researching Education: Data, methods and theory in educational enquiry*. London: Institute of Education.
- Skidmore, D., Perez-Parent, M. & Arnfield, S. (2003) Teacher-Pupil Dialogue in the Guided Reading Session. In *Reading, Literacy and Language*, 37 (2): 47 - 53.
- Smith, J. (2005) Understanding the beliefs, concerns and priorities of trainee teachers: a multidisciplinary approach. In *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 13(2): 205 - 219.
- Smith, V. (2004) Empowering Children? How can researchers initiate and research empowerment? In *Journal of Research in Reading*, 27(4): 413 - 424.
- Stevens, D., Cliff Hodges, G., Gibbons, S., Hunt, P. and Turvey, A. (2006) Research into transformations in learning and teaching in Initial Teacher Education. In *Literacy*, 40 (2): 97 - 105.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (ed.) (1996) *New Directions in Action Research*. London: Falmer Press.