# Dialogic Talk in the Classroom

Dialogic Talk

'Let's consider increasing classroom discourse (synonymous with classroom discussion or dialogue). Students would be invited to talk with their peers in collaborative groups, working to solve complex and rich tasks. The students would not be ability grouped, but rather grouped by the teacher intentionally to ensure that there is academic diversity in each group as well as language support and varying degrees of interest and motivation.'

'The effect size of classroom discourse is 0.82, well above our threshold, and likely to result in two years of learning gains for a year of schooling.'
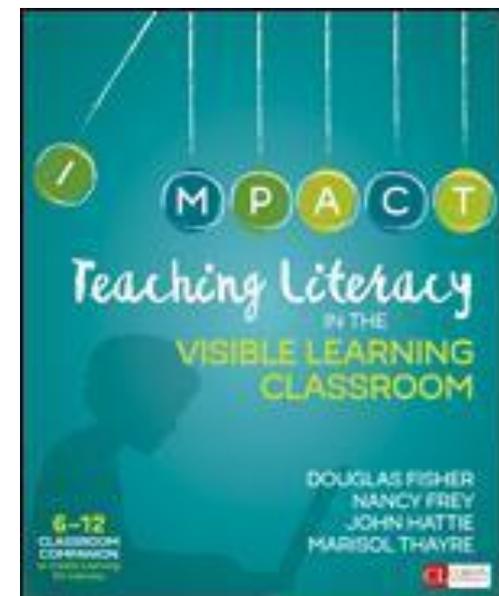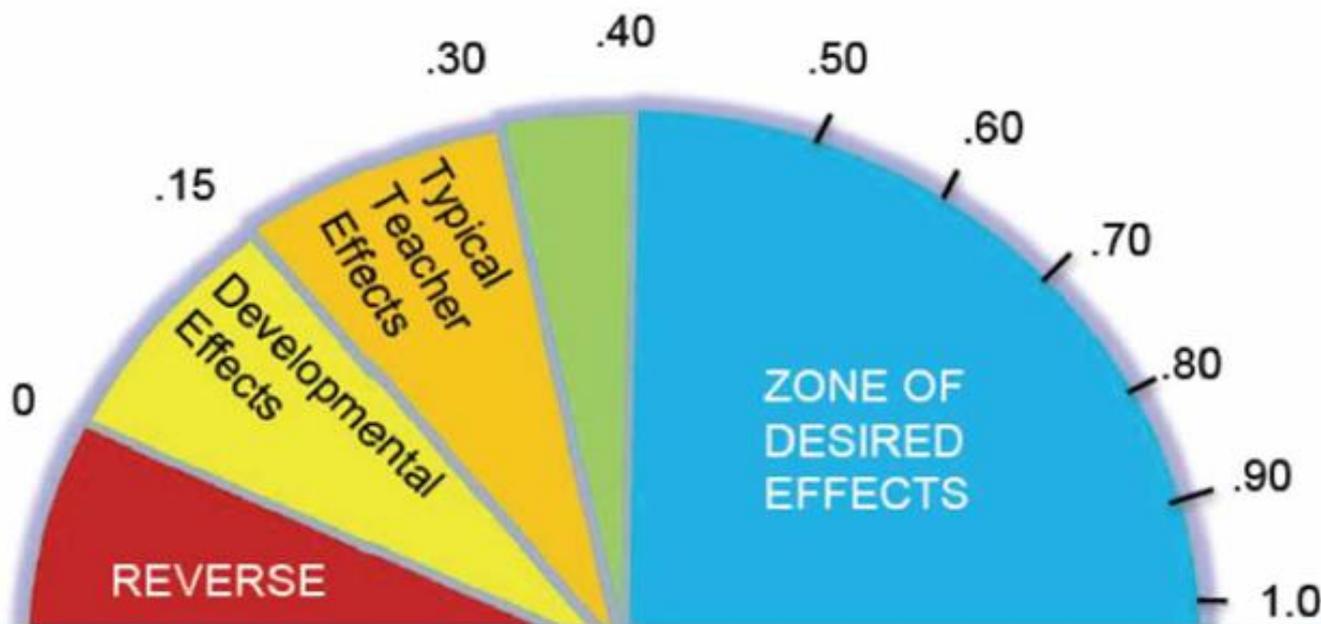
Setting Ground Rules

Pupils need to learn how to allow talk to happen and to take full advantage of its possibilities. They should:

- Listen

- Think about what they hear

- Give others time to think

- Respect alternative viewpoints

R. Alexander, 2017 - 17th Biennial EARLI Conference, Tampere, Finland Symposium H4, 31 August 2017

How to Set Up Exploratory Talk

- Unspoken rules of talk must be made explicit. Pupils need to develop shared rules for group talk and role-taking so they can collaborate.

- Teachers' questioning must stimulate pupils to higher-level thinking skills. Use a dilemma questions (or statements – i.e. controversial questions with more than one possible answer)

- When setting up the stimulating question, it must be done using open-ended activities like the Odd One Out, What's the link, a Continuum line, etc.

- It needs to be formalised into written notes or feedback. This will provide an opportunity for metacognition. They need to reflect upon their thinking.

Dilemma Questions/ Statements

Dilemma questions/ statements encourage pupils to form and discuss a developed opinion. The best questions/ statements will be those that pupils have differing opinions/ ideas on so they have to work through talk to a resolution of views

For example:

- Aslan is a coward. Do you agree or disagree?
- Why can't Narnia always be found in the same place?
- Edmund should be punished for the bad things he does.

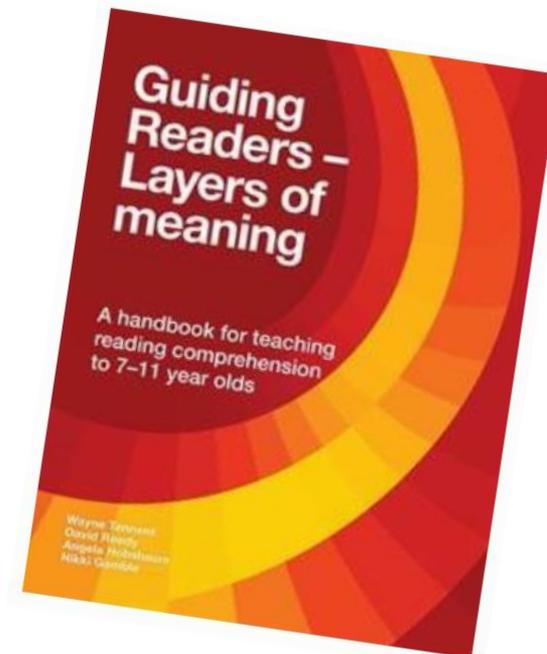Questions adapted from Lefstein & Snell (2014)

Modelling the Talk

Explicitly model this type of talk by demonstrating:
- How to disagree without offending others (*That's an interesting idea but…*)

- Competing to take turns without being aggressive (*Could I just make a point here…*)

- Signposting a change of topic (*Have you considered….?*)

- Using modal expressions and verbs to express tentativeness, probability, possibility, and intention (Rather than say '*You are mistaken*' say '*Could you be mistake*n?'

- *'Discussions, and particularly dialogue, present the greatest cognitive challenge to pupils: they are the kinds of interaction most likely to develop children's thinking. [...] The challenge for the thoughtful teacher, therefore, is to ensure that discussion and dialogue become an integral part of the talk repertoire of every reading session.'*

Guiding Readers – Layers of meaning

A handbook for teaching reading comprehension to 7–11 year olds

Wayne Tennent
David Reedy
Angela Hobsbaum
Nikki Gamble

Dialogic Talk: What does research tell us?

Weaker Practice	Stronger Practice
Brief interactions, rapidly moving from pupil to pupil in order to increase pace and participation	Sustained interactions in order to develop sustained an incremental lines of thinking and understanding
Quick response expected	Time to think or discuss prior to response
Pupils focus on providing the 'right answer'	Speculative talk and thinking aloud is commonplace
Closed 'test' questions asked by the teacher	Open 'authentic' questions asked by all and shaped by what immediately precedes them
One answer accepted	range or responses accepted
Teachers gloss over incorrect answers	Teachers use answers as a stepping stone to develop understanding
Pupil's answer marks the end of an exchange and teacher's feedback closes it	Exchanges interweave, grow and develop with the lines of thinking
Feedback used to praise and encourage ('Excellent', 'Good', 'Not quite', ' Ye-es…')	Feedback used to inform and develop lines of thinking
Feedback evaluates pupil's response (teacher assesses)	Feedback asks pupils to expand on their thinking, to justify of clarify their opinions, or make connections to their own experiences (teacher replies)

Class Discussion: Knowing the rules…

True discussion takes place when the teacher **stops** being the go-between.