What influences student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk in the primary classroom?

Submitted by Anne Fisher to the University of Exeter
As a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy by Research in January 2011

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

Signature:
Acknowledgements

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Thanks are also due to Professor Kleine-Staarman for her helpful suggestions and comments about the reader’s experience.

To the three cohorts of postgraduate students, and particularly the nine case-study student teachers, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks. The opportunity to engage in depth with the hopes, thoughts, values and beliefs of these students, rather than simply comment on their attempts to attain the QTS standards, was a privilege. Without their openness, and trust, it would not have been possible to gain insight into the ‘hidden’ factors which influence practice.

Finally, thanks are due to my two sons, both teachers, who were always sure that their mother was capable of becoming a researcher.
Abstract

This thesis examines what it is that enables postgraduate student teachers to promote the recently introduced curriculum innovation, dialogic talk, in primary classrooms. Drawing on literature relating to the way talk has been enacted in English classrooms for the last thirty five years, it suggests that patterns of verbal interaction have continued to prove resistant to change, despite policy imperatives and university courses.

Adopting a collaborative action research approach, data were collected in three cycles over three years to investigate the perceptions of three successive cohorts of postgraduate students of the role of talk in learning, and the place of the teacher in developing it. Using a sociocultural lens, students’ conceptual and pedagogic understanding of dialogic talk, and their ability to promote it, is examined in depth through nine case studies, as are the factors which the participants themselves identify as enabling or inhibiting engagement with innovation.

It is suggested that the lack of a commonly agreed definition, and of readily available theoretical guidance, has reduced dialogic talk to just another label. As such, it can play no significant part in developing practice beyond rapid question-and-answer routines of ‘interactive teaching’ and the potentially reductive IRF (Initiation, Response, Feedback) script recorded by researchers (Mroz et al, 2000; Myhill, 2006) before, and after the inception of the National Literacy Strategy (1998a).

Turning to the role of the university, it questions the place of the ‘demonstration lesson’ and whole cohort lectures, urging that significant changes need to be made to the role of the teaching practice tutor, and the nature of ‘partnership’ between schools and university departments. Finally, it speculates that without a significant change in the way university departments examine, and address, the values, attitudes and memories of talk that student teachers bring with them from their own primary classrooms, there will continue to be replication of practice.
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Speaking from the heart

I remember all four of my primary schools very clearly. Although they were completely different in every respect, from geographical location (Lancashire mill town to rural Wiltshire hamlet), to size (a sprawling rag-bag of wooden huts around a two-story Victorian brick block, and Miss Read’s village school – two classrooms and a coke-fired furnace), they were completely interchangeable in one respect: the teachers’ views about talk, and who controlled it.

As an anxious only child, who had attended three schools by the age of six, my overriding memories of the time were a wish to do the ‘right thing’ (I had been brought up to ask if I did not understand), and an excitement about learning. I was desperate to join in each teacher’s monologue; to ask for clarification; to offer my own emerging interpretation; to agree that I, too, had experienced the emotion/experience/situation. By the time I was six, I had discovered that I was ‘fussy’ (their words) and that because “I know you know, Anne, put your hand down”, knowledge, and engagement, were not viable currencies. Neither were interest, nor the depth and sincerity of emotional response to a poem, a piece of music or a picture.

I learned not only not to call out, but also not to put my hand up. Even at six, I learned that no one was actually interested in what I thought, or believed, or did not understand. I discovered that learning came in parcels, small and uncomplicated, or large and tied with knots so impossible that my clumsy hands could not undo them. I thirsted to discuss things; I burned for someone to agree that they, too, wanted more than anything to discuss what might have happened in a book if the two main characters had missed each other by two minutes. I ached for ideas and imagination to have a value.
I would, I think, have passed out with sheer surprise if I had been allowed to ask a question, particularly the ones I asked in my head, which generally began with “but what if...?”

How sad to learn, before the age of seven, that there is only one answer to a question; perhaps even worse, that there is only one question to be asked. Talk in the classroom, I felt intuitively, had to be about more than the social gossip that was tolerated in art. In more ‘academic’ subjects, my teachers did not appear to link it with learning, much less collaborative learning, and looked on it as something akin to cheating.

My sharpest memory relates to the final term spent in the village school. One hot afternoon, I asked a question. I think I was asking for clarification about some instruction issued in the morning. A meaningful silence filled the room. The teacher rose to her feet, red in the face, and shouted, spittle showering my desk. I had flouted some unspoken rule of dialogue. The others, she said, should smack me on the way home for my ‘naughtiness’.

The post-script to this might have been that I learned never to ask a question again. In reality, I learned to be subversive. I moved to another primary school, and on to secondary education, with a sophisticated understanding of how to ridicule the teacher sotto voice. I had graduated from being ‘fussy’ to being a ‘distraction’.

If we learn to ‘be’ through dialogue, then I did not exist at school. A bright child condemned to getting by, and guessing what was in the teacher’s head, it would be a long time before I began to believe in my own ability. As an educator, my central principles, and values, have been built on those childhood experiences. My pupils, and later my student teachers, have been encouraged to talk, question and challenge, and to see me as a co-learner. I have tried to create an ethos where all, but particularly the articulate and able, are encouraged and valued. I understand that when someone asks for clarification, it is not because they are fussing, it is because they need help to develop confidence and resilience. Equally, if they are
given a voice in shaping the enquiry themselves, they might have a deeper understanding of what is required.

In the course of this research, one articulate postgraduate student’s writing summed up my own experiences exactly: “I struggled to keep my excited hand by my side”, she wrote. How well I remember that feeling.

1.2 The centrality of dialogue and the case for change

Almost twenty years ago, working as an advisory teacher for English, I ran a series of staff meetings and twilight training sessions on the recently elevated subject of oracy (Wilkinson, 1965). Following the inclusion of Speaking and Listening as a component of equal weight with reading and writing in the National Curriculum (DES, 1989) and the work of the National Oracy Project (Norman, 1992), primary head teachers requested guidance on establishing speaking and listening as a part of the curriculum. Those workshops, with the mix of discussion about establishing ground rules for talk, reference to the work of Barnes (1976), Galton (1980) and Tizard and Hughes (1984), and modelling of practical strategies for promoting cognitively challenging dialogue, were not significantly different to the university based sessions I teach today.

This thesis, therefore, concerns itself with a puzzling issue: if the primary curriculum has had an emphasis on dialogue for over twenty years; if schools have had series of in-service training programmes in the wake of the National Curriculum (DES, 1989), the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998a), and Talk for Writing (DCSF, 2008); if universities have embedded social constructivism within their teacher education programmes for at least ten years – why have patterns of classroom talk remained essentially unchanged? Barnes (1976) asks who has decided that patterns of talk are how they are, and how teachers and children learn them. This is, indeed a question that has also intrigued me for some time.
It was during the completion of my Masters dissertation on guided reading, that I began to think the emphasis I had always placed on higher order questioning, as a teacher, a literacy consultant, and a teacher educator, was misplaced. An encounter with the work of Alexander (2001) suggested to me that it was not the questions we asked which was of paramount importance, but what we did with the answers, and how that exchange was used to move thinking beyond a recitation script. Much to my shame, I discovered (I use the word advisedly) at the same time that “using the techniques of dialogic talk” was to be found as a strand of core learning for speaking in the recently introduced Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics (DfES, 2006, p.41). At this point, I questioned how I, as a teacher educator responsible for primary English, had remained unaware of this for an entire term. I was also conscious that I only comprehended what these ‘techniques’ might be as a result of my Masters research.

Given the serendipitous nature of my understanding of dialogic teaching, and my awareness of the reductionist nature of ‘interactive classroom teaching’ (Myhill, 2006; Smith, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003; Mroz et al, 2000) promoted by the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1988), I wondered how much practicing teachers understood about dialogic talk, where they had received their training, how they embedded it in pedagogy. Further, and perhaps most importantly, I questioned if this was how a radical change in the conduct of classroom talk was expected to come about. If theoretical guidance provided regarding interactive teaching had been negligible, there appeared to have been none at all on dialogic talk for primary teachers.

1.3 Assuming the mantle of expert

Despite being identified by Medwell et al (1998) as an effective teacher of literacy, were I to return to the classroom now, I would now be a very different teacher; one who asked fewer questions. In the same way, during the first two years after moving from school to university, my English sessions were probably an uneasy mix of in-service training supported by overhead transparencies of quotations
plundered from theoretical texts. Although opportunities to observe colleagues were taken, there seemed no way of knowing what the role of a university lecturer actually was, and how they were to position themselves: as ‘experts’ in their subject, or as ‘trainers’ delivering a mandated curriculum. There seemed to be no ‘third way’: that of a partner in a dialectical process of constructing understanding. This uncertainty was only resolved by time, reading and reflective discussion; however, without the will to engage with this, presumably I would have continued to teach the ‘demonstration lessons’ which win most approval by students. Moving away from a recitation script requires confidence, yet humility: a willingness to be seen as a co-learner rather than an encyclopedia. This is the case regardless of one’s status as a student, teacher, lecturer or professor.

My experience as a teacher educator over the last eleven years indicates that primary postgraduate student teachers are very willing to engage in paired discussion during taught sessions. They are, however, reluctant to feed back to the larger group, and insightful, reflective discussion is regularly reduced to a set of brief generalizations offered by a handful of contributors. As a professional tutor, it is also clear that the same students find it just as difficult to promote and manage discussion in their placement classrooms. Although the taught English course has been explicitly linked to the work of Mercer (2000) on exploratory talk, Dillon’s (1994) alternatives to questions for the last ten years, and more recently, to Alexander’s (2001, 2008) dialogic teaching, there is a sense in which these approaches appear to be disconnected from the ‘real world’ of school. The ‘classroom’, be it at university, or in school, is not always seen as the forum for posing tentative ideas: wishing to be told the correct answer by the tutor is translated into wishing to be given the (also correct) answer by pupils.

Students clearly bring with them a number of beliefs about teaching and learning, and as Brownlee (2001, 2003) and Schommer (1994) contend, epistemological development (the individual’s concept of what equates with knowledge) is strongly linked to learning. Becoming a teacher involves the reinvention of ‘self’, and the creating of a professional identity. At this point, many students feel themselves to
be vulnerable and somewhat reluctant to see knowledge as anything other than an absolute, transmittable, commodity. For some, assuming the mantle of ‘expert’ means knowing the answers, demonstrating, in a ‘University Challenge’ fashion, that the teacher’s talk role is to impart knowledge to the ignorant, and to provide a concrete demonstration of that ‘knowledge’. In asking why classroom talk seems resistant to policy and curriculum initiatives, perhaps the questions which need to be examined are how far students’ own experiences allow them to embrace current curriculum guidelines on talk, and if these experiences will allow them to move beyond a reductive engagement with interactive teaching.

The thesis, therefore, examines the theoretical underpinning of dialogic talk and its relationship to learning. It also debates how far the inclusion of six words in non-statutory curriculum documentation might bring about a change in the patterns of classroom dialogue, which have reportedly remained essentially unaltered for the last forty years (see, for example, Barnes, 1976; Mercer, 1995; Galton et al, 1980, 1999; Alexander, 2001).

Crucially, the central question, asks what the factors are which influence student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk in the primary classroom, and the part that their pedagogical and conceptual perceptions of it plays in this. In attempting to address this question, it explores the experiences, attitudes values and dilemmas of three cohorts of student teachers, and takes the reader into the classrooms of nine students, as they struggle to develop a professional identity whilst grappling with the complexities of dialogic talk.
Chapter 2 - A Conceptual Framework

This chapter attempts to investigate and connect a number of complex and interlinking strands relating to primary postgraduate student teachers’ use of dialogue for learning in the primary classroom, in the context of literacy. It looks particularly at the concept of ‘dialogic talk’: an approach to classroom discussion recently introduced to primary curriculum guidelines by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2006) in the Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics, going on to question the part that students’ perceptions and understanding of dialogic talk plays in their ability to promote it.

The opening section begins with an overview of the process of conducting the literature review. This is presented as a means of foregrounding for the reader the scarcity of pedagogical, and theoretical, guidance for primary practitioners on dialogic talk. Clearly, in order to have some idea of what it might look like in the classroom, it is first necessary to understand what it is. The chapter then introduces the rationale for the research, and goes on to examine the conduct of classroom talk over the last 40 years, beginning with Barnes’ (1976) seminal work on communication, and moving on to the pedagogy of the Literacy Hour. It examines the links between dialogue, pedagogy, and cognition, and the relationship of a social constructivist stance to this. The chapter moves on to engage with the plurality of perspectives on ‘dialogic’, and the essential links and differences between them, speculating on what this might mean for teaching.

The second half of the chapter considers what it means to become a ‘professional’, looking critically at the development of a teaching identity, and the roles played by pre-existing beliefs, the relationship with the mentor and the university. It moves on to acknowledge the difficulties associated with teaching literacy, and promoting talk for learning. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key themes arising from the literature.
2.1 Systematic literature review

The first phase of the research project was the development of a critical and analytical literature review. This was particularly important, since the lack of theoretical guidance for practitioners made it essential to obtain a detailed and comprehensive understanding of what might be meant by ‘dialogic talk’. Drawing upon two principal sources: peer reviewed academic journals and substantive texts, and Government documentation and curriculum guidelines, the literature review reports on the existing body of knowledge. It attempts to draw out links and connections between a number of different fields of enquiry: the development of teacher identity in primary trainee teachers; the ability to promote purposeful talk in the classroom, and the concept of dialogic teaching. In the light of MacLure’s (2005, p.393) critique of EPPI systematic review, this thesis does not intend to (intentionally) ‘downgrade the status of reading and writing as scholarly activities’, but to engage in a thorough and critical investigation of source material. Neither does it view research knowledge as fixed, or situated within discrete disciplinary boundaries. As MacLure indicates, it is hoped that through the use of intertextual connectivity, and serendipitous encounters with new ideas, ‘dialogic encounters will take place between researcher, literature and data’ (p. 394). This also acknowledges Hammerley’s (2005) work on research-based policy making and practice and does not assume that reports of randomised control trials offer the ‘best’ information, and qualitative case studies the worst. The purpose of the literature review is not simply to locate ‘knowledge’, but to determine possible lines of enquiry in the spirit of humility, rather than taking the conceptual and ontological stance which replaces intellectual curiosity with rule-following.

2.1.1 Clarification of terms

Initially, I sought to clarify the main terms within the research question ‘What influences student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk in the primary classroom?’ and to establish related topic areas. The principal question was further clarified by the identification of subsidiary questions:
• How do students perceive the pedagogical and conceptual construct of dialogic talk?
• How do trainees implement dialogic talk in the classroom?
• What experiences influence their implementation?
• What attitudes influence their implementation?

Firstly, a number of exclusion criteria were established. These related to English as an Additional Language (EAL), Further Education (FE), Special Educational Needs (SEN), pre-school and writing. The first theme, developing a conceptual understanding of the term ‘dialogic’ was then identified. Although new to the primary curriculum (DfES, 2006), it appeared to have its roots in Bahtkin’s approach to language; to be connected with a social constructivist approach to the psychology of learning, and to have been interpreted in a number of ways by contemporary researchers. An operational definition of the term was considered essential if, during the research process, all participants were to be reasonably clear what it was they were seeking to identify, and why it might be a positive pedagogical approach to learning and teaching. Key terms in investigating this were ‘dialogic teaching’, ‘dialogic talk’, and ‘collaborative learning’.

The second theme centred round trainees’ teaching – and listening – style in the classroom and the development of practice and teaching strategies. It was essentially concerned with conceptual understanding of the social constructivist epistemology of talk in promoting cognitive development. This was investigated using terms such as ‘social constructivism’ and ‘pedagogic knowledge’.

Themes three and four investigated the complex and interrelated web of factors which interact to construct what might be conceptualised as ‘teacher identity’. This is shaped by such diverse experiences as the way in which talk was structured and encouraged (or otherwise) in their own education, and the nature of the relationship with the mentor on teaching practice. Although attitudes to talk might well be influenced by the preceding factors, to this I needed to add social and cultural experiences developed prior to the course, and question how far the
university is able to challenge an established epistemology. To research this, I decided to focus on key phrases such as ‘trainee beliefs’, ‘student beliefs’, ‘epistemology’ and ‘initial teacher education’, in order to paint a picture of the emerging teacher.

The final identified theme concerned student teachers’ ability to identify and develop dialogic strategies through reflecting on their own practice, and articulating their emerging philosophy. This was investigated using such terms as ‘reflection’ and ‘reflective practice’. During the search, two extra categories were added: English teaching, and ‘collaborative group work’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search terms</th>
<th>Dialogic talk</th>
<th>Classroom practice</th>
<th>Beliefs, attitudes and values</th>
<th>Developing reflective practice</th>
<th>Emerging categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Particularly the characteristics which separate it from discussion and interactive teaching</td>
<td>Focusing particularly on classroom practice and teaching strategies</td>
<td>Focusing particularly on pre-existing beliefs, attitudes and values</td>
<td>Focusing particularly on self-evaluation, review, partnership and developing reflective practice</td>
<td>1. English 2. Small group dialogue</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

| Refined terms | Dialogic teaching Dialogic talk Interactive teaching Metacognitive development Reciprocal teaching Taxonomies of thinking Higher order thinking | Concerns of trainee teachers Trainee subject knowledge Curriculum and pedagogic knowledge Partnerships Teachers’ practical knowledge Teachers’ craft knowledge Teachers’ subject knowledge Social constructivism Mentoring School placement Communities of practice | Trainee beliefs Trainee attitudes Trainee values Trainee concerns Trainee epistemology Teacher identity Professional identity Challenges faced in ITT | Learning to reflect Effective reflective practice Feedback Discourse communities Participant reflection | 1. Literacy teaching English subject knowledge Effective literacy teachers The literacy hour Progression Oracy Interactive teaching 2. Small group dialogue Effects of pupil grouping Effective pupil grouping Small group interaction Small group composition Co-operative learning Social pedagogy Promoting group talk |

Fig 1: Search terms
2.1.2 Search strategies

The search procedure took place over a number of months; this commenced by devising terms suitable for searching the University of Exeter’s electronic database. Boolean operations and free text keywords were used to interrogate the British Education Index, ERIC, and EBSCO using a variety of bibliographic retrieval tools such as: Open URL Link Resolvers and full-text resource discovery. A further manual search was made, using the library catalogue to locate books on talk, or Oracy, published since 1988 and to locate relevant chapters and sections on developing talk. A list of national and international peer-reviewed journals closest to the field of enquiry was also devised. Using the title to determine potentially relevant articles, the abstracts of any identified articles were then read to determine relevance. International journals were included to provide breadth of perspective. These are presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systematic manual search of Key Research Journals</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>English-related</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>English in Education</td>
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<td>English Teaching: Practice and Critique</td>
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<td>Journal of Education for Teaching</td>
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<td>Language and Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
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<td>Reading Research Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Generalist journals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>American Education Research Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>British Education Research Journal</td>
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<td>British Journal of Educational Psychological</td>
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<tr>
<td>British Journal of Educational Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambridge Journal of Education</td>
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<td>Education 3 – 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Education Research and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Journal of Educational Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal of Educational Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal of Teacher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning and Instruction</td>
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<td>Mentoring and Tutoring</td>
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<td>Oxford Review of Education</td>
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<td>Research Papers in Education</td>
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<td>Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice</td>
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<td>Teaching and Teacher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Curriculum Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLRP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Westminster Studies in Education</td>
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<td><strong>UK professional journals</strong></td>
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<td>English 4 – 11</td>
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<td>Literacy Today</td>
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<td>Primary English Magazine</td>
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Fig 2: Literature Search
2.2 Introduction to students’ experiences

Although there is a considerable body of research extant regarding, for example, interactive teaching, and the discourse of the literacy hour, this relates to investigation of the practices of qualified and experienced teachers. Since much of this work suggests that many teachers do not find it easy to structure whole class, or small group, talk for learning, it is perhaps unsurprising that students struggle to promote purposeful dialogue when managing the complex social, communicative and cognitive demands of teaching practice. It seems a significant omission that the practices and beliefs of trainee teachers, with regard to the promotion of talk in particular, have not been examined. It is clear that upon their shoulders rests the opportunity to make radical changes in the way in which teachers and pupils interact and construct knowledge in the classroom.

Wells (in Wells & Claxton, 2002) suggests that the formative experiences of many teachers prevent them from developing collaborative communities of enquiry in the classroom; he goes on to link that to a perception that many position themselves as passive agents of the decrees of ‘experts’:

…nor can students be expected to develop confidence in their own knowledge and judgment, while recognizing the benefits that are to be gained from collaborating with others, if those who teach them are trained unquestioningly to implement the decisions of distant and authoritative ‘experts’ and are given no encouragement to assuming an agentive role in taking situationally appropriate initiatives in collaboration with their colleagues. (p.204)

If this is the case, it may in part explain the prevalence of the cognitively restricting patterns of discourse research suggests is found in many classrooms. However, we need to question why the explicit modeling and discussion of more dialogic approaches to talk with current cohorts of postgraduate trainee teachers do not necessarily lead to a change in classroom practice. Wells (ibid, 2002, p. 206) believes this to relate to “commodification of knowledge and intolerance of diversity”, and personal experience would suggest that where assessment scores are the driver, it is difficult for trainees to develop a spirit of enquiry. It will be argued here that there are a number of wide and diverse factors which impact on student teachers’ ability to promote talk for learning and to adopt a less
controlling role in managing the dialogue. These factors include an understanding of the role of social constructivism; well-developed pedagogic and subject knowledge; positive pre-existing beliefs about the role of talk; the stage of epistemic development; a productive relationship with the mentor on teaching practice, and the nature of their developing ‘teacher identity’. Each are significant in transcending the widely recognized triadic dialogue (Lemke, 1985), or recitation script of IRF (Initiation, Response, Feedback), which, when used unthinkingly, can close down opportunities for cognitive growth, and thus will be explored in the following sections.

2.2 Dialogue in the Classroom: Revisiting Barnes

A little over 30 years ago, Barnes (1976) wrote his seminal text ‘From Communication to Curriculum’ in which he speculated on the nature of talk for learning, looking particularly at patterns of communication between teachers and children. In this work, he argues that it is not sufficient to define teaching and learning in terms of a teacher transmitting knowledge to pupils; teaching and learning, he states, should also encompass structuring opportunities for the learner to take a greater part in forming their own knowledge. His research indicated, however, that in whole class questioning teachers struck an uneasy balance between promoting learning, and maintaining control; this often resulted in a recitation script, dominated by closed questions designed to elicit facts. This concept of a lesson, driven by the teacher’s teaching, rather than the pupils’ learning, will be examined further in section 2.7, but suffice it to say here that this close control of dialogue by the teacher remains a concern today. On a more positive note, Barnes also describes group work in which children grope their way towards meaning in exploratory talk, defined by the use of hypothetical language, in a series of false starts and hesitations. Here it is possible to see resonances with the later work of Mercer (1995, 2000) on ‘interthinking’ and Alexander’s (2005) five propositions regarding the emerging pedagogy of culture, dialogue and learning, in which it is suggested that a significant part of the teacher’s role is to create interactive opportunities for children to share and exchange ideas, solve problems, and achieve common understanding.
In the preface to his work, Barnes speaks of the need to promote ‘interactive’ teaching and learning, rather than a culture where teachers use their voice to “control and shape the thoughts of children”. Similarly, Cazden et al.’s (1972) work in America concluded that patterns of language had the power to affect, positively or negatively, the quality of children’s educational opportunities. This call for interactive teaching, informed by the writings of Bruner on shared negotiation of meaning, is echoed by Galton (1980) four years later in his study of the primary classroom. Galton saw little probing, questioning, exploratory thinking or guiding of individual children; where teachers were engaging in this type of teaching, they were more likely to be working (or interacting) with the whole class. It is interesting to note that in the 1980s, Edwards and Mercer (1987) found some evidence of negotiation of shared meaning in discussion, but still under the tight control of the teacher. Ironically, it is suggested (Myhill, 2004; 2006; Smith et al., 2004; Hargreaves, 2003; Mroz et al, 2000) that the National Literacy Strategy’s (NLS, 1998) more recent call for ‘interactive’ teaching methods has been the central factor in closing down opportunities for children to question, explore ideas, or regulate their own thinking. This will be explored further in section 2.3 below.

Finally, Barnes poses several important questions:

Who has decided that patterns of talk are as they are?

How do these patterns change?

How do children and teachers learn them?

How does this actually contribute to learning?

It seems that we still need to ask these questions today, over thirty years later.
2.3 Patterns of discourse in the Literacy Hour

Even before Barnes’ (1976) call for a more considered approach to dialogue in the primary classroom, one which focused on the development of reflexivity, arguing that speech enables us to control thought, Wilkinson (1965) asserted that the processes of speaking and listening (Oracy) had been shamefully neglected. Since then, there have been a number of moves to raise the status of talk in the classroom, for example the National Oracy Project (1987 – 1993), which went on to influence the inclusion of speaking and listening as an attainment target of equal weight with reading and writing in the original National Curriculum Orders for English (DES, 1989). This stated that children should learn to express views and opinions; to speculate and hypothesise, and to take into account the work of others. In 1995, the revised National Curriculum orders (DfEE, 1995) recommended that children should talk for a variety of purposes, including making exploratory and tentative comments when ideas are collected, and evaluative comments when the discussion moves to a conclusion. The work of Mercer (1995), Galton et al (1999) and Alexander (2001), however, continues to report overwhelmingly monologic patterns of classroom discourse which follow a recitation script, rather than opening up opportunities for children to actively construct meaning through transformation of what they already know and understand. More recent research, examined in the following section, posits that the National Literacy Strategy’s (NLS) (DfEE, 1998a) call for ‘whole class interactive teaching’ inadvertently made the situation worse, instead of better.

The introduction of a National Literacy Strategy (ibid), and accompanying literacy hour was conceived by the Labour government of the time as a major reform to drive up standards. Its central tenet of ‘interactive whole class teaching’ in which teachers spend 60% of their time engaged in direct instruction, was, according to Beard (1999), drawn from the literature of school improvement, particularly that of Reynolds and Farrell (1996), and Reynolds (1998); the latter defining ‘interactive’ as fast-paced recall questioning, followed by slower ‘higher order’ questioning. Merry (2004) and Galton et al. (1999), however, suggest the concept of interactive teaching is poorly defined in the original NLS Framework document (DfEE, 1998a, p.2) which offers little guidance beyond “pupils’ contributions are expected, valued and extended” and fails to explain to practitioners
ways in which it might differ from accepted (or traditional) models of whole class teaching; Myhill (2006) and Black and Williams (1998) go further, suggesting the term itself is meaningless, since the act of teaching is always interactive. Myhill (2006, p.20) also argues persuasively “interaction is too all-encompassing a term and does not adequately describe or reflect the multifaceted ways in which talk can play out in the classroom”.

Practical advice was finally made available to teachers a year after the introduction of the literacy hour with the issue of two ‘fliers’: Talking in Class (DfEE, 1999a) and ‘Engaging all Pupils’ (DfEE, 1999b). It was made clear, however, that although teachers were to encourage children to elaborate on their answers, and affect the course of the discussion, this was to be achieved without loss of sight of the objectives. Unfortunately, video training material provided for schools (DfEE, 1998b), viewed by a great number of teachers, modelled literacy teaching as a series of rapid and intensive question-and-answer sessions.

The consequences of this rapid interaction can be detected in, for example, the research of Mroz et al. (2000), English et al. (2002), Hargreaves et al. (2003), Alexander (2004) and Myhill (2006). In their analysis of the discourse of 10 effective teachers of literacy, Mroz et al (ibid) found that rather than the ‘interactive teaching’ they had anticipated, they found a directive recitation script. This three-part exchange structure typically comprises three moves: initiation: usually a teacher question; response: in which the pupil ventures an answer; follow-up: in which the teacher provides a (usually evaluative) feedback. It is a format, typical of discourse analysed in the UK and North America (Mehan, 1979; Dillon, 1974; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Hardman & Williamson, 1998), which often achieves the aim of increasing pace, but a loss of elaborated, reflective answers. Pupils are channeled towards convergent answers based on factual information through what Mroz et al (2000: 382) term ‘interrogation’. Indeed, their study found that the use of starter questions, similar to Edwards and Mercer’s (1987) ‘cued elicitation’, often provides strong clues as to how questions are to be answered, and how they will be evaluated. Myhill’s (2006) two-and-a-half year study similarly indicates a pattern of transmissive teaching supported by a discourse framework of teacher initiation and single pupil response, with over 60% of questions posed inviting a predetermined factual answer. Mroz et al. also found that the discourse style remained the same, regardless of the age of the children,
and the size of the group. Similarly, Skidmore et al. (2003), in their study of teacher-pupil dialogue in guided groups, found that talk was closely controlled by the teacher, who asked few authentic questions, and developed discourse patterns which closely resemble Bakhtin’s ‘pedagogical dialogue’: here the ignorant are instructed in the ‘truth’. According to Haworth (1999), this pattern is also true of groups working independently: pupils mirror the discourse style with which they are familiar – that of the teacher - with an authoritarian speaker closing down dialogue and discussion whilst pupils bid for turns to speak.

Drawing on the findings of the Study of Primary Interactive Teaching (SPRINT) project, English et al (2002) suggest that the NLS (DfEE, 1998, p.8) drive for “teaching that is well paced with a sense of urgency” and “interactive teaching” has created a pedagogical dilemma for teachers who have to attempt to reconcile styles in which both “broad pupil participation” and “sustained in-depth one-to-one interaction” (English et al. 2002, p. 9) are required. Hargreaves et al. (2003) also examine possible consequences of this tension between pace and interaction, highlighting in particular a disappointing lack of shift in practice, particularly in KS1. They propose that since the introduction of the literacy hour in 1998, although levels of interaction in whole class teaching increased, if this is defined by the number and frequency of questions asked, over half the time allocated to whole class teaching is spent in giving instructions and information. One of its most significant findings, which may suggest a resonance with trainees’ attitudes towards classroom dialogue, is that although all of the teachers studied were positive about interactive teaching, over one third of the sample referred only to surface features, such as engaging pupils, conveying knowledge and promoting practical involvement. Less explicit aspects such as developing thinking and learning skills were not mentioned by two thirds of the sample, who were also unable to make reflective links between their own practice and theoretical concepts. In behavioural terms, the teachers saw ‘interactive’ as the intense question and answer episodes mentioned above.

As Myhill (2006) suggests, the Bullock Report (DES, 1975, p.141) was hugely influential in its construct of the teacher as orchestrator of talk in lessons, seen as “a verbal encounter through which a teacher draws information from the class, elaborates and generalises it, and produces a synthesis”. This appears to have remained a constant in
practice over the last 30 years and, ironically, in a quest to improve the nature of dialogue in the primary classroom, the National Literacy Strategy (DfES, 1998a), and the Primary National Strategy (2003) appear to have contributed to a lack of progress. It seems particularly unfortunate that this appears to have impacted so negatively on the dialogic potential of classrooms. Its underpinning principles of scaffolding, interactive and collaborative group work, apprenticeship/guiding, and moving to independence are clearly based on a constructivist model of teaching, and Corden (2000, p.24) discusses the way in which “imaginative and enthusiastic” teachers had found the NLS liberating. However, since speaking and listening was implicit, rather than explicit, in the Strategy, it always ran the risk of becoming marginalised as teachers drove towards reading and writing objectives, and, as noted above, used fast-paced low level questioning to ensure ‘compliance’ with its directives. It may be that the pedagogy of discourse in the literacy hour has become reductionist through a misguided interpretation of the nature of interaction and its relationship to higher order thinking and questioning. It may also be speculated that the change in focus to more teacher-directed questioning might well have lead to a culture of learned helplessness rather than one of cognitive challenge.

2.3.1 Talk routines as a form of democracy

The literature examined above has suggested that the nature of classroom discussion has become increasingly teacher controlled and reductive in the attempt to reconcile ‘pace’ and ‘interactive’ teaching. It has been suggested that the Literacy Strategy itself was underpinned by a desire to create a modern democratic, technical society (Corden, 2000). This leads to the consideration of a further factor in the management of fast-paced shared question-and-answer routines: that of turn taking as a form of democratic equality. According to Alexander (2001) English teachers place their emphasis on participation at the expense of pupil engagement and thematic continuity, conducting brief unsustained Interactions, rapidly moving from one pupil to the next to maximise participation. This emphasis on the importance of equal distribution of teacher time and attention among all the pupils, and participation by all of them in oral work, in every lesson, has become an embedded feature of English pedagogical culture. Where there are anything up to 40 pupils in a class, and only one teacher, Alexander (ibid) believes it is “inevitable that
competitive bidding and the gamesmanship of ‘guess what teacher is thinking’, and above all searching for the ‘right’ answer” (p.15), becomes the central feature in children’s ability to ‘get by’. Mejita and Molina (2007) refer to this type of exchange as ‘The Opinion Market’ (TOM) in which the aim is to get all to contribute, regardless of the quality of what they have to say. In return, the pupils’ aim is to demonstrate that they are actively engaged in the discussion. However, this ‘engagement’ does not include listening to others, and the outcome is a series of isolated monologues on a common topic.

It is instructive to note that in Alexander’s (2001) comparative study of Russian classrooms, the pedagogical talk was entirely different, with only a proportion of children expected to contribute orally. Rather than a swift, competitive, guessing game, fewer children were expected to participate in a carefully constructed sequence of sustained exchanges. In this ‘collective’ learning ethos, the speakers acted as representatives, rather than individuals, and directed their talk to their peers as much as to the teacher. This elimination of ‘gamesmanship’ and its replacement with a probing, cognitive challenge may represent a significantly stronger learning opportunity than a reframing of the teacher’s opinion.

2.4 The relationship between dialogue and pedagogy

It is, perhaps, a false distinction to divide this section on pedagogy from the following section on social constructivist perspectives. This, however, has been done to draw a distinction between empirical classroom-based research, and the underpinning provided by cognitive psychology. As we have seen, empirical classroom research for the last 30 years has indicated that discourse patterns are monologic, controlled and shaped by the teacher. Current research suggests that to maximise active participation, and develop intersubjective understanding, there needs to be a significant shift in classroom practice. Smith and Higgins (2006) suggest that the locus of attention should be placed, not on the questions that teachers ask, but more on the way in which they react to pupils’ responses; in this they share some commonality with Alexander’s (2005) notion of an ‘emerging pedagogy’ of talk as a means of helping to shape and develop children’s engagement with learning and understanding. Smith and Higgins draw on the Primary
National Strategy’s (PNS) advice to teachers to use ‘wait time’ and varied, open questions to encourage active responses. Open questions are defined as those which have a “range of acceptable answers” (DfES, 2003, p.23) rather than a single right answer, and are based upon a social constructivist perspective where pupils use talk to speculate, hypothesise, reason and evaluate. The role of interactive teaching in this context becomes one which promotes ‘exploratory talk’ (Mercer, 2000) for individual knowledge construction and shared understanding.

Smith and Higgins (2006), in common with other research drawn upon in this study, found a paucity of open questions in their observation of over 200 literacy and numeracy lessons. Their consequent critical reflection on the constructs of open and closed questioning led them to suggest that the teacher’s intent in asking the question determines whether it is, in fact, open or closed. Taking into account both Edwards and Westgate’s (1994) suggestion that if questions are asked to elicit what the questioner knows, they are clearly closed, and Galton’s (1999) counterargument that the definition should be based not on teacher intent, but on their reaction to the answer, Smith and Higgins reached a conclusion closer to that of Nassaji and Wells (2000). They posit that if the teacher avoids an evaluative response in the follow-up move in an IRF exchange, and instead requests justifications, counter-arguments, or connections, this can foster cognitive development. For Smith and Higgins (2006, p.492), therefore, “the feedback move is an act indelibly tied to teacher intent and teachers’ conceptualisation of the role of talk as a tool for learning”. They also raise the issue of unpredicted pupil responses which take teachers beyond their pre-existing intentions for the lesson, and possibly outside the parameters of their subject knowledge. It is possible to see why trainee teachers might find sustaining meaningful dialogue outside their comfort zone, challenging. As Alexander (1992) argues, the way responses are dealt with says less about their quality, and more about the way in which the teacher brings the discourse back to the planned agenda: in this way, apparently open questions can be seen as not open at all.

In order to move beyond a recitation script, teachers need to encourage pupils to ask and answer questions; to direct interaction; and to review each other’s contributions. They themselves should model reciprocal engagement through making ‘backchannel moves’
during discussion to reflect genuine interest in what is being said; this links somewhat with the work of Alexander (1991) and more closely with that of Dillon (1994). In Patricia Alexander et al.’s (1991) typology of three key elements relating to demands placed upon learners, the second construct, conceptual knowledge, includes the term ‘discourse knowledge’: the ability to convey understanding to another. This, they suggest, is achieved through teaching about language and its uses, although this appears to relate expressly to syntax and rhetoric rather than the development of conceptual understanding. In Dillon’s (1994) ‘alternatives to questions’ he suggests that making statements elicits longer, and more complex, responses than asking questions, and thus are instrumental in developing a pedagogy of dialogue.

2.4.1 New Literacies

Young (1992) draws attention to the difference between freedom of enquiry, and freedom to get on with learning accepted doctrine. Linking this with the work of Habermas, he argues that the role of the sceptic in a group may often act as the catalyst for learning. If we dare to think that children might learn more quickly when they are given the room to agree, disagree, ask for more information about claims made, even by the teacher, then the work of Collins (1995) centred around the notion of ‘new literacies’ is significant. This research suggests that language and literacy are social practices, rather than a set of skills to be learned. Within this theoretical construct are two central tenets: social literacy, in which the role of the home and culture is acknowledged to be significant in developing multiple literacies; and dialogic language, which, Street (2003) argues, is always part of social interaction in a “negotiated process of meaning making as well as taking” (p. 82). Similarly, Hicks (2003, p. 3), in defining ‘discourse’ as a “dialectic of both linguistic form and social communicative practices” draws attention to ‘dialogic utterances’ which become meaningful only when considered in their juxtaposition to other utterances within the chain of speech. Echoes of this view are clearly heard in the writing of Wegerif (2008), Fisher (2007) and Wells (2007) amongst others. McGuinness et al.’s (2005) work on the development of metacognition in primary classrooms in Belfast, makes a three-way link between metacognition, pedagogy and dialogue. In what they term as “new [dialogic] pedagogy” (p 2), relationships are established through a focus on individual and
social learning in a social constructivist context: the role of dialogic talk is seen as a mediator for metacognition.

The following section teases out more fully the contribution which cognitive psychology, in particular social constructivism, has made to the study of dialogue.
2.5 Exploring the social constructivist perspective

According to Halliday (1993), when children learn language, they learn the very foundations of learning. This relationship between dialogue and cognition is drawn from a social constructivist perspective of learning which proposes an interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge. Following what Bruner (1990) refers to as the ‘cognitive revolution’, social constructivism marked a radical shift from the behaviourist approach to learning, developed by writers such as Thorndike (1906). Behaviourist approaches emphasised the importance of directing the learner’s response through direct instruction; teachers used demonstration, repetition and testing, through a pre-planned sequence of skills, in order to transmit factual information. In contrast, cognitive psychology focuses on ‘meaning making’ and related cognitive structures (for example, schemata and heuristics), which are believed to underpin the ability to solve problems and make connections. According to Palincsar (1998, p.348), there are many versions of constructivism, but all are in agreement that “learning and understanding are inherently social; and cultural activities are regarded as integral to conceptual development”. In this approach to learning, teacher and learner engage in a reciprocal quest for meaning through affective, mediated dialogue. The theoretical perspectives underpinning this notion of social interaction as a basis for higher levels of reasoning and learning are broadly based on the work of Piaget and his followers, and on that of Vygotsky. In ‘Acts of Meaning’, Bruner (1990) defines it thus:

Our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depends as well on shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation. (p. 13)

In examining links between culture, the spoken word, and learning, Bruner’s (1986) seminal work ‘Actual minds, possible worlds’, places emphasis on the importance of both communicative (cultural) and sense-making (psychological) aspects of talk. Seeing speech as central to cognition, Bruner positions children as problem-solvers who use dialogue to become active seekers of meaning, and to make sense of the world around them. Arguing that metacognition and critical thinking can be taught to young children, he argues that talking things through is an essential component of handling information and
deciphering new ideas and concepts. Symbolic Representation – the use of words to represent ideas – is, he states, the most important cultural tool in cognitive growth and learning. The ability to transcend visual ‘images’ and move to a more abstract verbal representation, therefore, helps with the coding of information and the development of flexible, yet complex cognitive restructuring.

Bruner’s writing clearly links with a number of principles of dialogic theory. The process of expressing thought in speech, considering, and possibly reframing it through listening to the self and others, and his suggestion that children’s own knowledge and experiences impact on their interpretation of ideas, links with Nystrand’s (1997) notion of genuine questions, Wells’ (1999) dialogic enquiry, and Wolfe and Alexander’s (2008) emphasis on the importance of joint meaning making between teacher and pupils.

Piaget’s (1932) sociocognitive conflict theory, however, presupposes that conflict between the learner’s existing understanding and subsequent experience leads to disequilibrium; this in turn forces the learner to question her beliefs and move beyond current understanding. There is some disagreement about whether this is best achieved through peer-peer interaction (see, for example, Bell et al. 1985, in Palincsar, 1998) or adult-peer interaction, as proposed by Rogoff (1991), who found that children who worked with adults were more likely to succeed. It may well be that, as Forman and McPhail (1993) suggest, successful peer collaboration is often restricted because it requires a shared means of communication. This, they argue, is not easy for children to access because of the preponderance of the restrictive recitation IRF model of classroom instruction requiring the restriction of “conversational responses” to the teacher’s questions (Forman and McPhail, 1993, p. 226).

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of development centres around the social dimension of consciousness. Here, learners internalise the effects of working together, building new strategies and understanding of the world (Vygotsky, 1978; Palincsar, 1998; Daniels, 2001), and the primary means for securing this development is discourse. It has been well documented that much of Vygotsky’s writing has been made accessible through the work of Bruner, and thus, it is unsurprising that their position on the cultural, and
cognitive, importance of language are similar. In arguing that individuals learn through communication and interaction with others in an active process of co-construction, he states “the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual” (Vygotsky, 1986:36). His theory that development of ‘higher mental processes’ and abstract thought is achieved through internalization of ideas and concepts places language at the heart of thinking and active cognitive self-regulation. It is significant for this study that in his work, he strongly questioned the effectiveness of direct transmission of concepts, seeing it as “pedagogically fruitless…this approach achieves nothing but a mindless learning of words, an empty verbalism” (Vygostsky, 1987:170). If this is linked to his hypothesis that talk precedes conceptual development, then, as Maybin and Moss (1993) suggest, children’s ability to develop collaborative understanding and interpretation of texts through talk may be in advance of their individual comprehension level. This significance of talking about text in an active process of meaning making though dialogic talk, taking into account the perspectives of others, will be examined further in later chapters.

The significance of a social constructivist approach to learning is demonstrated in action in many research projects, often centred on the teaching of literacy. The seminal work, for example, of Palincsar and Brown (1984) on reciprocal teaching was based on a hypothesis that by drawing on the collective memory, and variety of ways knowledge could be structured, groups could attain more success than individuals. In reciprocal teaching, teachers were encouraged to model, then hand control of comprehension strategies to children by getting them to lead discussion and pose their own questions. The concept of teacher modelling of multiple discourse strategies was also researched by Raphael et al (1992) who examined the teacher’s role in engaging American fourth and fifth graders in book discussion. Their work demonstrated that pupils could reach higher levels of understanding, and were more able to engage in cognitively challenging discussion, when the teacher explicitly modelled ways of expressing a personal response to text, and illustrated patterns of interaction. Similarly, Scardamalia and Bereiter (1989) and Rogoff (1991) developed approaches to learning based on the concept that the process of explaining thought leads to deeper cognitive engagement; that cognition is a collaborative process, and thought is internalised discourse. In common with much
research, Studies by King (1990) and Teasley (1995) also found that guiding reciprocal questioning improved reading comprehension and collaborative problem solving. What seems more significant is that although much is made of the benefit of talk for developing learning, according to Palincsar (1998) it is the type of talk that is significant:

…the benefits depend on the type of talk produced. Specifically, talk that is interpretive (generated in the service of analysis or explanations) is associated with more significant learning gains than talk that is simply descriptive. (p.365)

In all this, the role of the teacher in mediating discourse, suggesting new lines of inquiry, considering ways to ensure sharing of responsibility for problem-solving and developing a risk-taking ethos is pivotal. Adams (2006) cautions that in the current educational climate, teaching for procedural or conceptual understanding becomes sidelined, or ignored, since regular testing closes down learning opportunities.

If effective learners are seen as those who engage in meta-learning, acknowledge the role of emotions and locate learning within socio-cultural contexts, then as Black and William (1998) conclude, teachers need to teach learners how to reflect on thought processes rather than converge on the ‘correct’ answer. From a social constructivist perspective, understanding that a ‘wrong’ answer might be the consequence of personal interpretation, subject to question, and part of a particular theoretical possibility, allows the pupil a role in the construction of knowledge. For Mercer (2000) the quality of teaching and learning depends on the contextualization of mutually negotiated talk. He defines this as: “a shared communicative space, an intermental development zone (IDZ) on the contextual foundations of their common knowledge” (p. 140).

This co-construction should extend to pupil-pupil interaction, with the teacher scaffolding the learning journey; this links inextricably with the symbiotic relationship between teaching and learning and epistemology, which will be examined further in section 2.8. Before concluding this discussion, it is appropriate to draw attention to the work of Wegerif (2008), who argues that researchers’ failure to question their ontological assumptions has led them to conflate dialogic and dialectic. Although Bakhtin is frequently located within the neo-Vygotskian school of sociocultural thinking, Wegerif
senses a disjunction between Bakhtin’s dialogic (literally that meaning implies at least two voices), and Vygotsky’s dialectic: a model of learning influenced by Hegel (1975, in Wegerif 2008) and taken to imply monologism, or the internalisation of thought in “the silence of a single consciousness” (Wegerif, 2008, p. 3). The following section goes on to question the nature of ‘dialogic’, and explore links between social constructivist perspectives and dialogic talk/teaching.
2.6 Dialogic talk

So what is the nature of dialogic language, and is it possible that teachers can use it to help children to play a role in shaping classroom discourse for learning? The roots of dialogic talk lie in Socratic approaches to dialogue: a dialectal process in which teacher and student share a joint inquiry in the search for a truth unknown to both parties. The term ‘dialogic’ to describe talk has only relatively recently appeared within the primary curriculum (DfES, 2006, p.40) and teachers are now exhorted to “Use principles of dialogic talk to explore ideas, topics or issues” when working with Y6 pupils in literacy. This request is not as straightforward as it would seem, since there are no explanatory notes on ‘dialogic talk’ within the hard copy of the Primary Framework for literacy and mathematics (PNS, 1996), and a search of the PNS website (http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primaryframeworks/literacy/) provides links to ‘talk’ and ways of managing ‘dialog boxes’. Although there appear to be generic principles underpinning the concept: for example, the posing of genuine questions, and transferring more of the responsibility for learning to the learner, academics (Nystrand, 1997; Wells, 1999; Skidmore, 2000; Alexander, 2001, 2004) variously talk of dialogic teaching, enquiry, pedagogy and instruction. Each, however, share a conviction in the potential of dialogue to transform learning. It may be useful at this point to draw on the work of Bakhtin, a contemporary of Vygotsky, who wrote of the intrinsically dialogic nature of language, stressing that it was “a living, socio-ideological thing [which] lies on the borderline between oneself and the other” (1990, p. 293), adding that it was at its most potent in the form of speech. According to Bakhtin (1990), this constant re-making of meaning can only be viewed in the light of what has gone (or been spoken of) before, expressing it thus:

*Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a word dominated by heterglossia. Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole – there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. (p.426)*

The work of Bakhtin will be returned to within this chapter, but the following sections attempt to tease out the common threads, and essential differences, between
contemporary academics’ writing on the nature of dialogic interaction – and its place within the classroom as part of a teacher’s pedagogic repertoire to develop cognition.

### 2.6.1 Dialogic Instruction

Nystrand’s major work ‘Opening Dialogue’ (1997) found a large-scale prevalence of recitational patterns of talk in the classroom, particularly with lower attaining children. He highlights the contrast between monologic discourse, often focused on transmission of knowledge and dominated by a recitation script, and dialogic instruction, which focuses on thinking. The notion of dialogic instruction is synonymous with the teacher’s willingness to ask genuine questions, that is, those to which an answer is not known; the ability to take up, and build upon, children’s ideas, and to allow children to modify the area of discussion. Nystrand cautions, however, that simply increasing the number of ‘authentic’ questions does not necessarily have a beneficial effect on learning. Dialogic instruction combines increased use of authentic topic-related questions with careful structuring of opportunities for children to think and develop their own knowledge: clearly this is underpinned by social constructivist principles. Drawing on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, he stresses that the choices made by teachers in modes of classroom interaction have major implications for the epistemological development of the class, and the way that children are positioned as learners.

Besides genuine questions, important dialogic approaches to instruction highlighted by the research were the incorporation of children’s responses into subsequent questions, and ‘high level evaluation’ where children modified the discourse. The classroom strategies, which appeared to be instrumental in promoting this, included the use of learning journals and peer-response conferences. His work is not without criticism, however, and Skidmore (2006) draws attention to discrepancies over initial coding of the data, which led individual work completed by individuals seated, together to be designated as ‘group work’.
2.6.2 Dialogic enquiry

Wells (1999) draws together Leont’ev’s activity theory and Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics to form ‘dialogic enquiry’: the concept of co-construction of knowledge through developing reciprocal learning in the zone of proximal development. O’Connor and Michaels (2007) and Wells (2007) argue that when children learn language, ‘signs’ (which in this context may be interpreted as the words which embody a culture’s meaning-making stance), take on different meanings. They become more than simply ‘language’ and become about values and expectations, particularly in the school. However, although schools are full of ‘talk’, not all of it supports learning and thinking. Wells (1999) describes the process of dialogic enquiry as

*The collaborative behaviour of two or more participants as they use the meaning potential of a shared language to mediate the establishment and achievement of their goals in social action. (p.174).*

His research, conducted in Canadian primary classrooms, focused on the development of ‘communities of enquiry’ where dialogic, but not equal, partnerships were created between teacher and pupils to advance collective knowledge through ‘semiotic apprenticeship’. Wells also speculates on the criticism of I-R-F (initiation-response-feedback) discourse structure. Where the F (feedback) move is used to ask for clarification, exemplification or justification, for example, he suggests that it moves learning beyond a mere quiz and can encourage pupils to review, generalise and speculate on what has been learned. This has been touched upon previously in the context of Alexander (2004) and Smith and Higgins’s (2006) work in section 2.4. Where the answer is seen as the ‘fulcrum’ of the learning exchange, rather than the ‘end stop’, it becomes less significant if the original question was apparently open, closed, inferential or evaluative: the teacher has the power to use the answer to move the thinking on. In the same way, peers also might be encouraged to use the response as a springboard to another question.

Monologic discourse (alluded to in the opening of this chapter) is often conceptualised as ‘bad’ and related to the transmission of fixed notions and facts. Dialogic discourse, on the other hand, is viewed as relating to an intellectual openness, and possibilities for creative
thought. However, this over simplifies the position, as it is possible to lead a lecture which encourages question and challenge, and to manage a ‘dialogue’ in which only certain answers are expected and accepted. In alluding to Bakhtin, Wells (2007) argues that all communication is dialogic, and every ‘utterance’ may be viewed as a “link in the dialogic chain” (p. 255), however, the key to understanding the difference between monologic and dialogic, appears to be the stance taken by the speaker. Text, or speech, which requires nothing beyond comprehension and acceptance may be viewed as authoritative and monologic; that which invites a response, or even contradiction, requires an ‘internally persuasive’ or dialogic engagement. In the type of IRF exchange visualised by Wells (above), a ‘revoicing’ move by the teacher positions the speakers as equal collaborators in an effort to build a complex idea. Much of this work builds on Beriter’s (1994) progressive discourse, and is concerned with scientific enquiry.

2.6.3 Dialogic teaching

Perhaps in England we are now most familiar with Alexander’s (2001, 2008) writing on talk, particularly ‘Towards dialogic teaching’ (2008), a small booklet aimed at practitioners, which presents a ‘case’ and ‘evidence’ for using dialogic approaches to classroom talk. However, in his large-scale comparative study of primary education in five countries, Culture and Pedagogy, he writes scathingly of the pre-service teacher-training programmes where students are informed that “interaction is ‘helpful’ to learning” (2001 p.431), rather than being made aware that it is ‘essential’, and that the teacher’s role is to intervene, not simply to facilitate.

In exemplifying the typical modes of interaction found across the surveyed classrooms, he presents a typology of discourse (p.517) categorised as: classroom organisation (whole class, group, individual); pedagogic mode (for example, direct instruction, discussion); pedagogic function (rote learning, scaffolding, problem solving) and discourse form (for example, interrogatory, expository, dialogic). Alexander (ibid) asserts that whilst whole class direct instruction is probably the most prevalent form of discourse, there are occasions when the teacher is able to construct a dialogic exchange. Here, Bruner’s scaffolded dialogue is used to enable the development of common
understanding through carefully structured and sequenced questioning, and thoughtfully handed-over concepts and principles. Unlike Wells, he sees this dialogic teaching as an opportunity to develop a ‘less unequal’ relationship.

In another booklet (2004) he questions the pedagogical underpinning of ‘whole class interactive teaching’, (explored more fully in section 2.3) as proposed by the National Literacy Strategy (NLS, 1998), since it appears to reinforce a culturally stereotypical model of competitive bidding for attention in a series of fast-paced, but short, undeveloped, responses to questions. Going on to call into question also the notion of ‘Speaking and Listening’, he proposes instead, a model of ‘dialogic teaching’ (p.29), which is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful. Dialogic teaching, he suggests, should foster thinking aloud as a means of allowing pupils to develop their ideas at greater length and should encourage extended exchanges. Alexander sees connections between dialogic teaching, Palincsar and Brown’s work on ‘reciprocal teaching’ and Mercer’s (2000) ‘talk rules’ in the shared emphasis on developing guiding principles for respecting each other’s talk.

Dialogic teaching, Alexander argues, does not include the common forms of learning (or drilling) by rote, accumulation of knowledge by recitation, or teacher instruction/exposition. It does, however, include discussion (sharing information; problem solving) and dialogue (achieving common understanding through structured, cumulative questioning). Although he argues that it is of the utmost importance that talk should be seen as a key goal of education, since competence in Oracy contributes to competence in literacy, Alexander (2008) adds:

*It is dangerous, arrogant and foolhardy to claim too much for an idea, however well-grounded in evidence it appears to be. Dialogic teaching is certainly not a panacea. (p.350

He appears clearly mindful of the consequences of, for example, adopting ‘whole class interactive teaching’ as a pedagogic approach, without questioning the theoretical underpinning.
2.6.4 Exploratory talk

Alexander’s theoretical concepts appear to have much commonality with Mercer et al.’s (1999) evaluative and hierarchical framework of disputational, cumulative and exploratory talk. Here, moving from talk characterised by disagreement (disputational), through the acquisition of ‘common knowledge’ (cumulative), pupils move to exploratory talk. Mercer and Littleton (2007, p.59) deem this as the state where “knowledge is made more publically accountable and reasoning is more visible in the talk”.

Fernandez et al (2002) posit that disputational talk is identified by individualised decision-making, and short assertions and counter-assertions and characterised by disagreements. It appears that, as Mercer and Littleton (2007) suggest, in order to scaffold and embed exploratory talk, the role of the teacher is central in determining the classroom ethos and ensuring opportunities for children to build on each other’s ideas. In arguing that ground rules are necessary to enable learners to engage, Mercer and Hodgkinson (2008) clarify the difference between exploratory talk, which requires an understanding that ideas will not be ridiculed or aggressively contradicted, and ‘presentational talk’, which tests understanding and focuses on correct answers. Although both forms of talk have a particular function, exploratory talk is seen as embodying the characteristics of accountability, clarity, constructive criticism and receptiveness.

2.6.5 The dialogic ideal and dialogic education

Recently, Lefstein (2010) has examined the persistence of non-dialogic teaching, speculating that its underpinning theories remain unquestioned (as the earlier ‘interactive teaching’). He suggests that both exploratory talk and dialogic teaching are under-pinned by a pedagogy built upon a process of harmoniously constructing shared understanding, and that ‘dialogue’ has come to suggest a plurality of voices engaged in an open and thoughtful quest for understanding. This ‘idealised’ picture neglects, however, difficulties and tensions inherent in talk. He speculates that dialogic ‘indicators’ have been converted into sets of rules, and dialogue into a set of observable ‘behaviours’. Whilst the dialogic ideal offers a useful critique of practice, it is not a guide for conducting practice.
Wegerif’s (2009) call for ‘dialogic education’ has a number of similarities. Dialogic education is seen not as teaching through dialogue, but teaching for dialogue. Here, dialogue becomes an end-in-itself; its aim is not to reach complete agreement, or to construct knowledge, but for speakers “to be more open to other voices, more able to question and to listen and so more able to allow new unanticipated meanings to emerge” (Wegerif, 2009, p.185). This conception of ‘dialogic’ concedes that there is a multiplicity of perspectives present in any response, not only to an original statement, but also to the other responses which may arise as a result of it. This appears to relate more closely to the ideas of Bakhtin in its assertion that dialogue is unpredictable and does not follow a pre-determined script. Inevitably in listening to others’ words, we cannot help but respond to them, and those responses are unique, because they are shaped by our personal history. He goes on to suggest that we might conceptualise dialogue occurring in a zone of proximal development (ZPD). As Yandell (2007) and argues, we perhaps need a wider view of the ZPD: one in which ‘social’ takes a wider meaning. Daniels (2001) expresses it thus:

*The nexus of social, cultural, historical influences takes us far beyond the image of the lone learner with the directive and determining tutor. It provides a much expanded view of the ‘social’ and the possibility of a dialectical conception of interaction within the ZPD. (p. 67)*.

Wegerif (ibid) suggests that in dialogic education, ‘learners’ discuss problems. Where the ‘problem’ is too closely matched to the speakers’ level of development, the zone does not expand; this is also the case when the problem is too hard. Rojas-Drummond (2002) posits that, when tackling a big enough, yet still manageable, challenge, children work within their ZPD and use the most complex and efficient type of talk: Exploratory talk. However, when problems are either too easy or too difficult, they resort to cumulative, or even disputational, talk. Fernandez et al. (2001) see this as a more equal, or symmetrical, version of the concept of the Intermental Development Zone which requires language to be used in a “dynamic and dialogical way to maintain and develop a shared context” (p.53).

Ensuring children work within their ZPD clearly requires a good understanding of the nature of development, and what would constitute a ‘developmentally appropriate’
problem. It also requires an understanding of ways to ensure that pupils do not try to impose their position on others, or agree uncritically to preserve harmony. If ‘meaning’ implies difference and multiplicity, the classroom ethos has to support trust and openness, and a toleration of disagreement: children need to be taught linguistic strategies to manage this. Although Lefstein sees pair conversation as affording ‘dialogic possibilities’, he acknowledges the problems inherent in the current culture of ‘whole class interactive teaching’, suggesting it might be sensible to focus the dialogue on three or four pupils, and to conceptualise this as ‘performance’. Dialogue, he posits, can profitably begin in difference and, through critical argument, reach “competing understandings and further inquiry” (Lefstein 2010, 7). To Alexander’s typology, he adds two further descriptors: *critical*, where participants explore points of contention, and *meaningful*, in which the participants consider their ‘horizons of meaning’ in relation to others’ and thus develop new (rather than shared) understandings. Each speaker brings their own set of meanings, views, values, beliefs and assumptions to the ‘back and forth’ of discussion. The dialogue then reflects each particular set of ‘prejudices’ back to each speaker, and, if ‘engaged’, participants can then consider a perspective beyond their own.

The IRE format continually privileges pupil contributions that are essentially reworking of teacher utterances’. However, to develop productive (dialogic) dialogue, Lefstein argues we need to work with the constraints of the classroom, rather than wishing them away. By its very nature, talk is contentious and messy.

### 2.6.6 Dialogical pedagogy: developing affective conditions for learning.

Dialogic talk builds on the sociocultural tradition of learning theory (Vygotsky, Leont’ev, Bruner), it also draws on the Bakhtinian conception of dialogic language in which a word undergoes ‘dialogisation’ when it becomes ‘depriviliged’: undialogic/monologic language is seen as authoritative and absolute. It appears, therefore, that when pupils take an active part in shaping the agenda of classroom discourse, there is potential to raise achievement. For Haworth (1999) Bakhtin offers an underpinning pedagogy for small-
group talk. She suggests that ‘addressivity’, the notion of utterances connecting with others in a chain of communication, is an essential feature of expressing personal opinion and understanding, and is what defines the character of a dialogic utterance. This has resonances with Halliday’s (1994) ‘interpersonal’ language, and Claxton’s (2004) notion of reciprocity, which develops the capacity to learn with others. Haworth also explores social language and speech genres, suggesting that in dialogic discourse, a speaker is able to “resist, reshape and reaccent a speech genre so it becomes half-ours and half-someone else’s” (p 101). Dialogue here becomes multi-voiced and versatile rather than “ventriloquated through single-genre authoritative texts” (p.101)

Skidmore (2000), however, suggests that there are a number of compelling reasons why teacher-led recitation continues to dominate classroom pedagogy at the expense of dialogic partnership. Firstly, he proposes large class sizes, and secondly the competitive use of assessment; he expresses it thus:

*Large classes + normative testing > transmission teaching (p. 511)*

To the dialogic lexicon, Skidmore (2000) adds the term ‘dialogical pedagogy’; this, he believes is a more comprehensive term which grounds dialogue for learning firmly in the theory and practice of teaching. He argues persuasively that in order to develop affective conditions for learning, we must acknowledge Hargreaves (1998) who refers to teaching as an emotional practice; Skidmore (2000) states:

*Over-reliance on recall and display questions in teaching furnishes a school uniform for the mind, confining students’ emotional involvement to an impoverished set of affective positions, such as the rivalry fostered by competing for the teacher’s attention, the disappointment (or relief) of being ignored, or the shame of being put in the spotlight and giving the wrong answer. (p.512)*

This dialogical pedagogy positions the teacher as a concerned co-learner in the community of learners: a guide and coach who models exploratory dialogue. This is echoed on McGonigal’s (2004) paper, which analyses postgraduate Certificate in Education students’ notion of an ‘inspirational teacher’. McGonigal asserts that dialogic teaching is not synonymous with interactive teaching, although there is the possibility of a dialogic relationship between curriculum concepts and classroom interaction when the teacher is heteroglossic (a perspective emphasising the role of language in positioning
speakers and their texts within the social positions and world views which operate in any culture), and able to accept diverse attitudes and responses to the subject without fearing loss of control. An inspirational teacher, he suggests, combines subject mastery of curriculum content and subject mastery of praise and belief in the pupils’ ability to “become the subject identity that derives from the shared surplus of seeing an authentic dialogue” (p. 125).

2.6.7 Bakhtin in the classroom: dialogic talk and conceptual learning

To return to Wegerif’s (2008) assertion that the term ‘dialogic’ has come to mean simply ‘pertaining to dialogue’, and to be seen as a means of constructing curriculum knowledge, it may well appear that the pedagogical appropriation of the label ‘dialogic’ will lead it to suffer the same fate as ‘interactive’. Indeed, one may speculate that it has fared worse, as the preceding literature suggested that primary teachers declared interactive teaching to be ‘a good thing’. The research undertaken in later chapters suggests that many primary teachers have ‘never heard’ of dialogic teaching, let alone considered its philosophical or pedagogic principles.

Bakhtin’s (1986) definition of dialogic is generally seen as shared enquiry based on ‘utterances’ (which may also encompass books), which speak with an “internally persuasive” rather than authoritarian voice, and view meaning as a product of dialogue. Wegerif (ibid) interprets this to mean that it is not possible to consider an ‘utterance’ in isolation, that is, as the words of the speaker and response of the listener, but as what emerges between the two. In this view of making meaning, it is seen as the product of difference rather than common understanding, much as a child begins to understand two perspectives at the same time: hers, and that of the teacher. Fisher (2007) adds that this dialogic capacity to see things from different perspectives rests on an ability to respond to three questions: “What do I say? What do you say? What do other people say?” (p.616). It may be concluded that this interpretation of meaning-making, which has much in common with the notion of ‘exploratory talk’ (Mercer et al, 2004), rather than Wertsch’s (1991) concern about the appropriation of the teacher’s voice through acting like a ventriloquist’s dummy, does indeed have implications for the way we teach.
The unifying theme of the various research reports analysed in this chapter, is the merit of valuing classroom discourse as possibly the single most important influence on pupil learning experience. It seems conceivable, therefore, that dialogic teaching, and dialogic talk, because of their capacity to expose children to different perspectives and viewpoints, has the potential to challenge and deepen conceptual understanding. Wolfe and Alexander (2008), for example, claim that exploratory and dialogic talk have the capacity to foster high-level thinking and intellectual development; Lefstein (2010) and Mercer and Littleton (2007) argue that if classrooms become places of critical inquiry where challenges are made to received knowledge, children are empowered to engage in critical reasoning. Coffin and O’Halloran (2008) see this from a Vygotskian perspective as episodes of transformative learning, but it is important to understand that this is a reciprocal process, with children and teachers constructing knowledge together.

There are several reports of successful classroom projects using dialogic approaches to learning and teaching, for example Dawes et al.’s (2000) Thinking Together; Alexander’s (2004) Dialogic Teaching, and Mercer et al.’s (2004) work on helping children to ‘talk like a scientist’. However, overwhelmingly it seems that patterns of classroom interaction are inextricably bound up with culture, history and consciousness of the teaching role (Wolfe & Alexander, 2008). Changing the contexts in which these approaches are embedded is clearly challenging. If we hope to encourage children to listen to others and to see things empathetically through their eyes, and help teachers to “Use principles of dialogic talk to explore ideas, topics or issues” (DfES, 2006 p19) then it is possible that it would be productive to work with trainee teachers before they take up their first appointments. The first step might be to help them understand that knowledge is not fixed; it is constantly “constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed” (Wegerif, 2006), and that it is not a matter of simply teaching the ‘facts’, since facts differ, depending on the nature of the questions we pose. Before this can be done, we need, perhaps, to question the competing factors that contribute to the construct of teacher identity, and ask how far trainees are able to relinquish control of dialogue when they are often working to establish themselves as a figure of authority in the classroom.
2.7 Developing a professional identity

According to Kagan’s (1992) seminal work on the professional growth of pre-service teachers, “despite four decades of empirical research, researchers appeared to know little remarkably about the evolution of teaching skills” (p.129). The need to develop a teaching identity, however, is seen by many (see for example, Smith, 2005; Maynard, 2000; Hayes, 2000; Campbell & Kane, 1998; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Stephenson, 1995; Hutchinson, 1994; Whitty & Willmott, 1991) as the most significant driver in successfully completing teaching practice. This is influenced by key factors on placement, for example the socio-cultural practices of the school, and the development of interpersonal relationships with staff. It is also driven, according to Calderhead and Robson (1991), by an image of a ‘good’ teacher drawn from their own experiences as pupils, although conversely (Sexton, 2007) students also are clear about the kind of teacher they do not want to be. For many students, it seems, the fixed notion of what constitutes a good (or poor) teacher means a continuing focus upon their own actions, rather than the pupils’ learning.

There is a considerable body of evidence documenting the centrality of pre-existing beliefs in determining the nature of the teaching identity students adopt initially, and in influencing how far they are able to engage with, and change, these identities as they develop. Both Smith (2005) and Hayes (2000) advise that mediating cognitive factors such as beliefs, theories, attitudes, understandings, intuitive theories and views of personal competence exert a powerful influence. Similarly, Hall and Raffo (2006) refer to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and biographical identities. These, they argue, especially familial connections with the teaching profession, provide a cultural framework which enables assimilation into a teacher training programme more quickly and successfully. According to Challen (2005), a particularly prevalent belief amongst trainees is that a career in teaching will bring predetermined rewards: intrinsic, such as the wish to work with children and help them to learn, and extrinsic, such as job security. There have been a number of models proposed to explain influences leading to the construction of ‘identity-as-teacher’. Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1985), for example, offer three explanations of this. Firstly, the ‘evolutionary’ theory which emphasises spontaneous
pedagogical tendencies; secondly, the 'psychoanalytic' explanation, based on the relationships students had with important people as children; thirdly, the 'apprenticeship of observation' theory which suggests that teaching models are internalised during their own education. The 'apprenticeship' model appears to have gained credence with a number of researchers; Joram and Gabriele (1998) and Wubbels (1992) for example, suggest that many students believe that they can become good teachers by copying those from their past. As Lortie (1975) cautions, however, this only provides access to the 'performance' of teaching and can lead to a distorted, one-dimensional, view.

Smith (2005) provides a useful multidimensional frame of reference from which to examine three competing influences: social, cultural, physiological and psychological. This has resonance with Maslow's (1954) 'Hierarchy of needs', although a situated social constructivist perspective adds that many needs are contextual rather than instinctive. Maslow's (ibid) hierarchy proposes that lower-level needs have to be satisfied before higher level needs can be considered. The lowest level of physiological need (usually related to food and shelter) may conceivably be translated as a fear of failing the course, and thus failing to obtain the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards proposed by Challen (2005) above. This in turn might lead to purely pragmatic reason for trainees to default to observed practice. The second level: that of a need for safety, in a predictable environment free from anxiety, may similarly result in the selection of teaching methods which are likely to result in successful classroom management. Whilst Admiraal and Wubbels (2005) stress the importance of trainees developing reflection on practice, as Spendlove (2006) and Hall and Raffo (2003) indicate, issues with behaviour management, and the daily practicality of teaching, often result in reflections on pedagogy coming second to pragmatics. Kagan (1991) suggests that many students become disillusioned after encounters with pupils who do not possess the same skills and interests as they do. Consequently, they gradually learn to adapt their planning to prepare lessons designed to discourage poor behaviour, rather than to promote learning.

Maslow’s third level of need, that of belonging, may be considered to represent a need to be seen as a professional; to be positively regarded rather than appear foolish, and as Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest, to cooperate rather than confront. This is difficult to
separate from the fourth level: generating both self-respect, and the respect of others. The drive for self-esteem and self-efficacy is complex, since this can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, with "success building on success or failure on failure" (Smith, 2005, p. 209). This resonates with both Bandura’s (1977) reciprocal determinism and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) participation in a community of practice. Both observation of teaching practice, and the theory of reciprocal determinism, suggests that trainees learn from practice which teaching approaches and strategies generate the most praise from mentors and pupils, and a belief that they hold the locus of control: this informs practice and leads to greater effort and success. Conversely, if the locus is perceived as external, trainees may view themselves as powerless and thus reduced in self-efficacy.

The highest level of need is the need for self-actualisation (or personal fulfilment). Hollyforde and Whiddett (2002), in their work on motivation, suggest that the need for achievement is driven by a perception of a positive outcome and personal value. This is dependent on an ability to develop independent behaviour, and sits well with Stevens et al.’s (2006) argument that the best learning occurs when trainees realise that good teaching comes from teachers who see themselves as learners. In what Atkinson terms “critical schizophrenia” and Hayes (2000, p.1) “a culture of diligence” it seems that independent behaviour is becoming increasingly difficult. However, a number of sources (for example, Hollingsworth, 1989; Poulson et al., 2001; Fisher, 2004) suggest an individual teacher’s beliefs determine how far they are prepared to accept advice or support from external agencies, or accept new pedagogies – and thus induct trainees into this mode of teaching. This relates to public and private learning: in the first, there is a public espousal of ‘theory, whilst in practice, contradictory beliefs are retained. Many teachers may pragmatically adopt a framework, but actually remain consistent in teaching style and attitude to their existing practice. Ball (1997, p. 261) terms this as absorption of “the language of reform but not its substance”. In encountering such pedagogical conflict, trainees may well default to the existing practice of the school, rather than engage in more sustained and tentative discussion with children. As Sutherland (2006) suggests, they are constrained by teacher evaluation which may well determine their progress towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Hall and Raffo (2003) express this dichotomy between university and teaching placement succinctly:
The potential for tensions to emerge for trainees between HEIs promoting the deployment of educational theory and schools emphasising the importance of practical experience is clearly immense. This is especially the case within the context of trainees struggling to sustain a critical outlook whilst developing their emerging competence at the same time in schools in which critical reflection is neither valued nor exemplified. (p. 2)

There are several competing models of teaching (Galton, 1999; McGonigal, 2004; Moore, 2004), for example the ‘competent craftsperson’ (explored further in 2.7 below), the ‘reflective practitioner’ and the ‘charismatic teacher’. In acknowledging that students bring pre-existing beliefs and constructs to their training, many of which will have been shaped by home, experience and the media, role conflict seems almost inevitable. A student who sees herself as a competent craftsperson may operate within a Foucauldian framework of discourse where linguistic parameters are set and patrolled by the teacher. In what Bruner (1996) terms ‘folk myths’ and Britzman (1991) ‘cultural myths’ the aspiring ‘charismatic’ teacher may believe that pupils need to be filled with knowledge which only adults, or one adult in particular, can supply. It may well be that an exhortation to reflect upon practice adds further to the confusion and discomfort in an absence of genuine understanding.

According to Moore (2004), those students who are willing to challenge their assumptions are often aware of the need to negotiate a professional identity. This might be best achieved within the dialogic spaces which, he believes, exist “between pre-existing views and ideologies; the advice and teaching of others; practical circumstances; practice-based learning and wider local and government policies” (p.16). This is evidently a sophisticated requirement.

2.7.1 The role of student teachers’ beliefs in broadening their teaching repertoire

Becoming adept in the use of cognitively stimulating discourse is one small part of the multi-faceted process of achieving professional status. Coming to terms with the complexity of the English curriculum, and having the subject, professional and pedagogic knowledge to challenge embedded patterns of discourse in the placement classroom, calls for an exceptionally well-developed epistemology. These pre-existing cognitive and
social factors are important in promoting the confidence to widen a teaching repertoire beyond that observed within the school, and to become part of a reciprocal network in which they feel free to change, or be open to change. Moore (2004) links this to the development of reflexivity in which students may be asked to consider what they see being taught as part of understanding their own beliefs and values:

_In a much bigger picture: a picture of what may be the practitioner’s own history, dispositions, prejudices and fears, as well as the wider social, historical and cultural contexts in which schooling is situated._ (p. 149)

There are further links to cultural capital if we examine the call from research (Mercer, 2000; Corden, 2000) for teachers to establish ground rules for talk. According to Lambirth (2006) this suggests the privileging of middle class modes of discourse and related value systems; this, he argues runs the risk of discriminating against those who express themselves in other ways inextricably linked to their culture and identity. Mercer and Littleton (2007, p.109) counter this, however, suggesting Lambirth’s (ibid) criticism takes an over-simplistic view of language in suggesting that the addition of a new oral language genre to children’s repertoire necessitates the deletion of another. They add that there is further confusion between dialect and genre. Exploratory talk, they argue, can take place in any regional dialect. Teachers therefore, have a key role in helping children to broaden their functional speech genres without denigrating the value of their local English.

Stevens et al (2006) discuss the dilemmas faced by trainees who faced conflict between their personal construct of English, and the curricular frameworks and assessment methods encountered in school; this, they state, made it hard for the trainees to feel they were joining an intellectual community of practice. Where self-efficacy is seen as dependant on others, the individual may become more closely influenced by the community of practice; susceptible to the practice of a role-model (or mentor) in which a restricted teaching repertoire is expected and respected, and become occupied with wearing the social, rather than pedagogic, mantle of teacher. If a trainee experiences significant difference between the demands of the teacher educator and host school, then the resulting cognitive dissonance may well lead them to seek a means of reducing tension. These themes will be explored more fully in sections 2.7.2 and 2.9 below.
It has been argued (Mercer, 2000; Corden, 2000; Grugeon, 2001) that talk is empowering, but in the light of this argument, perhaps we should question why some students remain silent during their course, and why they do not develop talk on their placements. Perhaps there would be a value in exploring more explicitly how far it is possible to develop dialogue in a value-free context. Teacher educators’ requests for changes in teaching style are, therefore, unlikely to be considered until students reach higher levels, and are more driven by their values and judgements. It seems unlikely that, given the preponderance of classroom discourse following a recitation script, that they would be confident enough to depart from the norm, and take an appreciable risk in encouraging open dialogue with pupils who remain, overall, under the control of their teacher.
2.7.2 The role of the mentor in developing practice

Researchers (for example Smith, 2005; Hayes, 2000) are in accord that the shortness of the postgraduate course tends to leave students’ belief set intact. Many sources (Coleman, 1998; Hayes, 2000, Maynard, 2000) however, suggest that the role of the mentor is crucial in determining how far the student is able to develop a teaching identity as ‘teacher as learner’, and Kagan (1992) emphasises the importance of experienced mentors who act as role models, standing back and openly reflecting on their own pedagogical beliefs. In social capital theory, the ability to get on is predicated on individuals being part of networks of rational and reciprocal arrangements of trust, and in school, trainees must engage and reciprocate strongly with their mentors to ensure they receive support and professional endorsement. This is a recurrent theme in the literature; Challen (2005, p.3), for example, writes that withdrawal from teacher training courses is often precipitated when “the anticipated relationship with the class teacher mentor proves unsatisfactory in the trainee’s eyes”.

This is echoed in the work of Hawkey (1997), Zanting and Verloop (2001) and Meijer et al. (2002) who find the relationship inextricably linked with the mentor’s perception of their role, principally regarded as most effective when focused on practical advice, such as lesson objectives, planning and classroom management, rather than cognitive issues. As Spendlove et al. (2006) indicate, mentors may well experience conflicting loyalty; they state:

Many mentors have sympathies which lie with trainees based upon their own experiences as a trainee and often adopt a protective role whilst trying to fast track trainees to the realities of ‘schooling’ as opposed to translating pedagogic knowledge onto practice. (p. 2)

Maynard and Furlong’s (1994, 2000) three tier model of mentoring appears to reinforce this. First, they identify an apprenticeship model, in which students learn by observation and acquire some teaching strategies; secondly, a competency model in which students systematically practise observed skills and techniques; thirdly, a reflective model in which students learn by critically thinking, and, in co-inquiry with the mentor, develop a deeper understanding of the process of teaching and learning. Others (Brown & McIntyre, 1995;
Maynard, 2000) add that in providing tips for improvement, mentors rarely examine the students’ underlying rationale for actions and decisions. Similarly, it can be as difficult for them to access mentors’ underlying beliefs, values and concepts (Tomlinson, 1995; Brown & McIntyre, 1995; Hawkey, 1997; Zanting et al, 2001; Meijer et al, 2002; Spendlove et al, 2006). In this way, root beliefs are never questioned, and there is little possibility of moving beyond the ‘how’ of teaching to the ‘why’ (Maynard and Furlong’s (1994) reflective stage or Schon’s (1987) notion of ‘reflective practitioners’). Meijer et al. (2000) are clear that observing how experienced teachers behave does not automatically help in the development of a deeper understanding of teaching, and that simply copying their behavior may result in an inappropriate imitation without insight.

The importance of ‘craft knowledge is underlined by Galton et al (1999, p184) who draw us back to the art of teaching “comprising the application of scientific pedagogic principles in a flexible manner”. They suggest that although concepts are best taught, and ideas mediated, through discourse, pedagogic principles, such as determining the size of group within which such discussions take place, is contextual, and based upon the ‘craft knowledge’ of the teacher. Current research (Edwards and Protheroe, 2003; Jones and Straker, 2006; Spendlove, 2006) indicates that until mentors are able to make both their practice, and rationale underpinning practice, accessible, they will be unable to foster an understanding of Schulman’s (1987) pedagogic content knowledge, which is defined as:

> The blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented, and adapted into the diverse interests and abilities of learners and presented for instruction. (p.8)

Jones and Straker (2006), however, contend that Schulman’s model of teacher knowledge is insufficient, since it fails to acknowledge the link between theory, practice and “the dynamics involved in the construction of these two aspects of teachers’ professional knowledge” (p.168). In other words, it might condone transmissive teaching. They also question how far mentors’ strategies reflect ‘espoused theories’ or ‘theories in use’ (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Young (1992) cites Australian research into teachers’ epistemology which suggests that even those who profess a belief in critical literacy and shared dialogue sometimes find themselves teaching from authority, or providing step-by-
step guidance for anxious pupils. There seems to be a general assumption that knowledge of practice is preferable to knowledge of theory; a view which might have arisen due to the reconceptualisation of teacher education as ‘training’ in a move to apprenticeship rather than intellectualisation.

It is important at this point to reflect on the large body of research cited at the start of this chapter. If it is correct in its claim that teachers are failing to change patterns of classroom discourse, then simply requiring mentors to explain their practice will be insufficient to bring about change, or to empower students to take a risk. Neither will it ensure that feedback on practice will move beyond tips for classroom management. Harrison’s (2004) research on the role of the NQT mentor suggests that many students enter their first year of teaching unable to move from focusing on their performance to focusing on children’s learning. She further suggests that the induction tutor struggles with the complexity of the role, and thus fails to effect a significant shift in beginning teachers’ conception of practice.

Admiraal and Wubbels (2005) and Spendlove et al. (2006) contend that the best way to develop a community of practice where teachers, students and academics share pedagogic content knowledge, is through enquiry-based learning. Just such an international research project based in the universities of Barcelona, Exeter, Trondheim and Utrecht, (Admiraal and Wubbels, 2005) posits that a neo-Vygotskian approach to providing immediate feedback to students can provide a “spiral model of ongoing professional development” (p. 317) which seeks to de-automise practice and make it subject to reflection. Wells (2002) refers hopefully to the changes in ITT preparation in universities around the world where students are introduced to constructivism and socio-cultural theories of learning. Unfortunately, he also acknowledges that many of the schools in which these students go on to teach will not support such enquiry.

Using more ‘professional’ than ‘academic’ language, Cordingley (2006) draws attention to the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching. In this document, talk is seen to be embedded in accessing support, and in seeking and interpreting feedback, acknowledging the fact that teachers learn reciprocally. At its heart is an important belief:
that effective dialogue depends just as much on active listening as on talking. The role of the mentor, the specialist coach and the co-coach includes the development of a shared vocabulary to build understanding of the wider picture. The overall aim, however, is to mentor teachers in developing the collaborative learning and sophisticated discourse strategies that it is hoped they will promote in their own classrooms.

2.7.3 The place of the university in developing thinking professionals

It would be naïve to fail to consider the place of the university course in creating thinking students. Studies by Rhine and Bryant (2007), Powell (2005) and Maclean and White (2007) acknowledge that in any attempt to move teacher education (training) programmes beyond the completing of competencies, universities need to pay more attention to developing strategies that might assist in the process of linking theory to practice. This they view as an essential part of developing reflective practitioners. The studies suggest that technology, such as on-line discussion, and the use of video to capture practice, has a place in supporting reflection on practice (Schon, 1990). It can also examine the epistemology of practice which is displayed by good teachers, and continuing professional development, through carefully scaffolded questioning. They further argue that the creation of teaching teams, which include teacher educators, might also dispel the view of teaching as a craft-based profession.

Although much of the literature suggests that the responsibility for creating ‘teacher as technician’ lies squarely with the student and the host school, some sources (see for example Poerksen, 2005; Borko and Putnam, 1996, 1998; Calderhead and Robson, 1991) caution us to look closely at practice within universities. Indeed, it would be complacent to suggest that the ‘training’ offered on a short course is always a model of best practice. MacLellan’s (2005, p. 143) view is that a ‘common sense’ notion of learning at university as “acquisition of new behaviour and/or knowledge, illuminated by experience” is insufficient to develop propositional learning: that which enables them to develop new knowledge and to problem-solve. This is an uncomfortable thought. Research suggests (Louden and Rohl, 2006) that students in Australia are similarly as eager to be taught procedural knowledge as their English counterparts and this can
cause pressure on academic staff to offer a more pragmatic model of training. For conceptual learning to take place, however, students need more than ‘training’.

Poerksen (2004) suggests that a key problem of degree courses is knowing how to begin teaching students “already moulded into shape by parents, schools and the peculiarities of their cultural environments” (p 471). He suggests that the first step might be to replace the teaching paradigm with the learning paradigm in order to avoid the ‘hidden’ perception that students (who are ignorant) need to be instilled with knowledge. Believing this apparent distinction between knowledge and ignorance puts dialogue at risk, he expresses it thus:

*The idea of the universalisation of the dialogical principle implies the inevitable monological forms of presentation – e.g. lectures, the writing of articles, books etc. – should be understood to be speaker dialogues, elements of a superordinate dialogue situated in the university. If you write or speak your first sentence with a dialogue in mind, you will speak differently.* (p. 474)

McVittie (2004) and Davies (1991) define members of discourse communities as those people who feel they have a right to speak, and the opportunity to redirect the conversation. To create spaces for student teacher talk is, therefore, essential in creating greater learning opportunities, both in university and the practice classroom. Although Poerksen is writing about science courses in HE, rather than ITT, and from the perspective of a German institution, his concerns resonate with central tenet of this inquiry. In asserting that from a constructivist perspective, successful communication is unlikely, and that we must learn to listen in a way which is not dominated by whether we agree, a mirror is held to the university training course and some difficult questions are asked. If, as Hargreaves (1998) suggests, emotion is at the heart of teaching, and university courses do not always feature the necessary “interest, enthusiasm, inquiry, excitement, discovery and risk-taking” (p 835) he suggests are the necessary cognitive scaffold for learning, then we undoubtedly need to re-examine ITT courses.

Much has been made over the last twenty years of the growth of ‘reflective practice’. Loughran (2002) refers to this disparagingly as the “unquestioned bedrock” of teacher education programmes and suggests it may be as “meaningful as a lecture on
cooperative group work” (p. 33). The juxtaposition of the two statements in his article is interesting, in that it suggests universities need to examine how, and why, they model the practices they require students to embed within their own teaching repertoire, and how they go about linking theory to practice, without denying the particular value of either. As Merry (2004, p. 22) suggests, if we wish student teachers to have a genuine awareness of the rationale behind teaching strategies, we need to ensure that teaching moves beyond “a repertoire of training tricks”.

Moore and Ash (2002) write that for reflection to have any impact on practice, it has to be critical, challenge perceptions and acknowledge other positions, and make a significant contribution to change. They offer a useful summary of the practices encountered in the name of ‘reflection’, namely: ‘ritualistic’, linked to performativity, for example reflection on lessons taught in the practice school; ‘pseudo’, which may be prompted by genuine intentions, but does not lead to change; ‘constructive’ or ‘authentic’, which problematises situations and challenges beliefs in such a way that change is achieved; ‘reflexivity’, where the reflection moves beyond the classroom, and takes into account the student’s own life history. This raises a number of questions: how far do university tutors model reflexivity, what structures are in place to help students to develop this skill, and how far are life histories taken into account? These questions will be revisited in Chapter 7.

The following section goes on to explore other possible reasons why students may be unwilling, or unable, to develop dialogic approaches to learning, suggesting that their own understanding of the nature of knowledge has a significant part to play.

2.8 Epistemological development as a factor in valuing dialogue

It has been suggested that epistemological development should be taken into account in the design of Initial Teacher Training courses (Brownlee, 2001; 2003). As Schommer (1994) and Chai (2006) both contend there is a strong relationship between learning and epistemology, and this inevitably impacts both upon cognitive and metacognitive function within the classroom, and the conception of self as a teacher. Putnam and Borko (2000) similarly urge that student teachers need to consider how they themselves learn before they can consider how to teach others. An extensive body of literature (see, for example,
Perry's (1970) pioneering work on male undergraduates led him to propose a continuum of belief sets: Dualism, Multiplism, Realism and Commitment. Individuals, he suggests, move from a set of absolute truths transmitted by authority (Dualism), through a degree of uncertainty, into a major shift in thinking where truth is considered to be a construct based on interpretation of experience. Although this study is not without criticism for its narrow sample and gender bias, it nonetheless paved the way for further research, for example, Belenky et al (1986), researching females from a wider background, suggests a similar sequence of 'ways of knowing' which begins with 'silence' and concludes with constructed knowledge. In 1993, Baxter Magolda proposed yet another, related, set of four epistemological stages. Each of the above models, have however, been subject to question for their unidimensional and relativistic underpinning (Schommer, 1990; Hofer, 2001; Goldberger 1996 in Brownlee, 2001) since 'truth' is contextually and culturally dependent.

Perhaps the most significant theory was proposed by Schommer (1994) who stated that epistemological beliefs may be characterized as multidimensional and relatively independent; this means that students may hold sophisticated and naïve beliefs concurrently, in a type of 'frequency distribution'. According to Schommer (ibid) the more that students view knowledge as dualistic (composed of absolute truths), the more likely it is that they base understanding on factual standards. Those with a relativistic perspective are likely to reflect on their own thinking rather than focus on acquiring knowledge, and those who reach an understanding that knowledge is constructed are more likely to engage in developing meaning and application.

As acknowledged at the start of this section, the simple reason for lack of engagement might be that the shortness of the postgraduate course. Arguably, this leads to a wish to be 'told', rather than to engage in speculation, critical thinking, or reflective dialogue, themselves. For Moon (2004) the notion of critical thinking is inextricably intertwined with epistemological development: the learner's view of the nature of knowledge. She suggests many are at a stage of received knowing, where learning takes place through
passively receiving knowledge; in turn, this deference to external authority leads to unquestioning teaching. Brownlee (2003, p.87) similarly asserts that at an early stage of epistemological development, students will tend towards ‘silence’ indicating that they believe knowledge to be Bahtkinesque: transmitted via authority, and absolute. According to Florio-Ruane and Lensmire’s (1990) study of student teachers’ attitudes to teaching writing, all their case study participants entered the programme with a clear picture of the teacher as an information giver, and saw learning to write as a process of learning a set of rules. If this is the case, then an epistemology which indicates that truth and knowledge is ‘out there’ rather than mutually constructed, and subject to change, would constitute a powerful reason for students to undervalue dialogue as a cognitive stepping stone.

2.9 The complexities of teaching literacy

Bryan (2004) proposes that the current literacy curriculum has been used to reconstruct the work of teachers, with English presented as a package of basic skills, requiring teacher professionalism to be ‘earned’ through demonstration that policy documentation is being followed. In section 2.3, I alluded to some of the tensions and complexities associated with teaching literacy; for example, the inadequate explanation of pedagogic terminology such as ‘interactive teaching’, and the issue of espoused theory/theory in use, for teachers who are reluctant to engage with a literacy framework imposed through a top-down, tightly controlled process. To that we need to add the complexity of the subject itself. According to Twisleton (2006) and Medwell et al (1998), in literacy, pedagogical content knowledge is synonymous with subject knowledge: it is not practical to separate knowledge from application. They believe that ‘non-experts’ fear the subject, and that it is this which leads to ‘script following’. If this is the case, it may explain to some extent why students are unable to use literacy skills in a variety of contexts, and draw on children’s experiences beyond the classroom.

As acknowledged above, students are influenced to a great extent by their pre-existing notions about the role of the teacher and of schooling itself. Twisleton (2006) and Ball (1994) argue that in a culture where they feel pressured to ‘perform’, they may search for a range of practical activities which make them feel confident and purposeful in the
classroom. This indicates little understanding of the importance of scaffolding rather than ‘enjoyable activity’ as the key to learning. Twisleton (2006) states:

*It [literacy] can never be reduced to a series of good lessons, containing new content, taught to students who then teach it to children. Effective literacy teaching cannot be captured simply by ideas for activities. (p 89)*

In contrast to other relatively ‘hands-on’ subjects such as design technology and art, English can seem dauntingly theoretical; an understanding of concepts such as phonology, morphology, figurative language, composition and transcription, to name but a few, appear to require a deeper theoretical understanding. Further, this needs to be set against a socio-political backdrop where teachers are frequently called to account for a drop in standards in literacy, by both government and the media, and where national policy on the teaching of reading is the subject of heated debate.

Twisleton draws persuasively on Tochon and Munby's (1993, p. 206) “synchronic time epistemology” which posits that in a dynamic process, expert teachers draw on a number of knowledge bases to respond to particular learning questions: they are able to ‘seize the moment’ to connect and combine knowledge. Novice (student/pre-service) teachers, by way of contrast, operate within a diachronic time epistemology. This is linear, based strongly on planned use of time, and fails to scaffold children through a “transferable generality of knowing” (Greeno, 1997). Her research identifies three categories of student teachers: task managers who view their role as ensuring children complete the task; curriculum deliverers who are able to make reference to learning, but view learning objectives as ends in themselves; and concept and skill builders who view tasks as vehicles for developing skills and concepts. Twisleton concludes that even ‘English specialists’, on reaching the end of their four year course, remain task managers. Perhaps we may speculate from this that the nature of the literacy curriculum, and the theoretical nature of the subject, prevented these students from developing the crucial inter-linking necessary in, for example, learning to read. If this is the case, then those who view their role as essentially delivering the curriculum are unlikely to allow time for talk, or to encourage dialogue which might move the planned activities from the defined outcome. Such students operate well at substantive level, but not at syntactic level, failing
to know how content is connected with the subject, and the ‘ways of knowing’ particular to literacy.

According to Alexander (2006, p. 5), pedagogy is “what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command in order to make and justify the many different kinds of discussions of which teaching is constituted”. As Bryan (2004) states, however, many students see the PNS as ‘law’ and their teachers are at a disadvantage (Williams, 2000) because their own education did not focus on developing metacognition through high level discussion. Where this is the case, there may be a failure on many levels: first, a failure to engage in the professional discourse necessary to analyse successful practice in literacy, and secondly a failure to model strategies for just such metacognitive development in small group discussion.

2.10 Difficulties relating to the promotion of pedagogic dialogue

If we accept that research is correct in identifying a lack of cognitively stimulating discourse in the classroom, and similarly that postgraduate students have been joining the ranks of the profession in large numbers each year for the last 20 years, then we need to examine why there has not been a significant shift in practice. The opening section of this chapter posited that a large and complex web of factors beyond the “commodification of knowledge and intolerance of diversity” (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 206) have contributed to maintenance of the status quo.

Brown and McIntyre (1995) refer to a ‘deficit model’ of inset; this, they believe, discourages teachers from reflecting on, or analysing their own practice since they expect it to be a depressing business. The resulting poor level of classroom implementation of valuable innovative ideas may be predicated on reluctance to reject their perception of “normal desirable states of pupil activity” (p.116), for example when relates to patterns of discourse. If this is the case, then such teachers would be unlikely to provide dialogic role models, or to engage in reflective dialogue with student teachers about the place of talk in developing cognition, unless it formed a part of their existing pedagogic repertoire. Moore (2004) similarly talks of the growth of a “discourse of pragmatism” whereby teachers and
students attempt to reconcile competing curriculum initiatives “perceiving pragmatism as desirable in itself, both as a response and as a position”. He adds that this places too much emphasis on the power of the individual (teacher); as Britzman (1991) suggests:

*The problem is that when the power of individual effort becomes abstracted from the dynamics of the social, student teachers cannot collectively intervene in the complex conditions that push them to take up the normative practices that discourage their desires for change. (p.122)*

It has been argued in section 2.7.1 above, that students may well emerge with QTS without altering their pre-existing beliefs. This chimes also with Moore and Ash’s (2002) Reflective Practice Project which found that postgraduates are just as likely to be influenced by memories of their own teachers, or media representation, than by any attempt to challenge, or change this during their course (see also Hollingsworth, 1989; Britzman, 1991). Mezirow (1991, p.49) similarly refers to ‘meaning schemes’ which ‘protect’ individuals by acting as a mechanism through which any new material is accommodated into their existing, an unchanging, philosophy.

The work of McGonigal (2004), discussed previously, considered the concept of the ‘inspirational’ teacher; Moore (2004) also believes that the discourse of the ‘charismatic’ teacher is a powerful myth founded on Bruner’s notion of ‘folk pedagogy’ and supporting the notion that children are empty vessels. He suggests that ‘charisma’, the characteristic regularly cited by students as paramount in a good teacher, might be better conceptualised as ‘communicative’. This offers a potential bridge to move all engaged in teaching from the cult of personality, through acquisition of a set of skills, to a growth in understanding, particularly of “knowing when to talk, when to listen and when to interrupt” (p. 74). It must be questioned how this shift might occur, since, as we have seen, neither massive curriculum change, country-wide programmes of training, in-school INSET, or taught courses in university, seem to have achieved more than a surface change in practice.

The power of dialogic approaches to learning and teaching can extend, as indicated by the literature (for example, Baines, Blatchford, and Kutnick, 2003; Blatchford et al, 2003; Gillies, 2006), beyond whole class teaching. Indeed, it may be argued that productive use
of cognitively stimulating dialogue could be explored most fruitfully in small-group learning. This, however, does not appear to be widely recognized by teachers as a practice that promotes thinking. There is speculation that it may be due to the perceived challenge to teachers’ control, the demands on organizational changes, or the sustained effort required to manage talk. As Baines et al. (2003, p 31) point out, “creating effective group working tasks and conditions is harder and more time consuming than a traditional independent and didactic learning approach”. It may also be the result of a lack of understanding of ways to scaffold dialogue, and of what their talk role might be in promoting this.

If Gillies (2006) is correct in her supposition that teachers (and, I would suggest, students) lack an understanding of how strategies for cooperative investigation may be embedded in the curriculum, then it is fair to suppose that the higher cognitive challenge of fostering ‘interthinking’ (Mercer, 2000) or co-learning through a social pedagogical approach remains a challenge too far for many. Gillies (2006) refers, however, to a year-long programme in Israel (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shachar, 1990) in which teachers were ‘trained’ to change their practice and patterns of interaction with children in order to create more facilitative learning interactions. The significance of this, I believe, lies in the phrase “trained over a full year” (p 274); the current postgraduate taught course of 32 weeks attempts to introduce the theory, subject knowledge and pedagogy of 10 curriculum subjects; the complexities of planning and assessment, and related government initiatives – all at Masters level.

2.11 Conclusion

The central concern of this thesis emerged from the requirement of the Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2007) for teachers, and therefore student teachers, to use the techniques of dialogic talk to promote discussion in the primary classroom. Lacking any further guidance in the Framework document, it was not clear to me precisely what was meant by this term; whether it indicated that Alexander’s (2005) propositions for a dialogic classroom should be followed, and how readily these propositions were available to practising teachers; or if it was simply to be taken to mean ‘dialogue’. A wide and significant body of research (Dillon, 1974; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Hardman &
Williamson, 1998; Mehan, 1979; Myhill, 2006) continues to assert that discussion in primary classrooms is overwhelmingly monologic, generally following a recitation script. The failure of the Literacy Strategy (DfES, 1998) to bring about a significant shift in classroom practice via ‘interactive teaching’ has been attributed to a lack of guidance for teachers regarding the cognitive benefits and pedagogic strategies of such an approach. It seems that the exhortation to use the principles of dialogic teaching may also be unsuccessful for similar reasons.

One of the most significant factors to emerge from the literature is the lack of any commonly agreed definition of the term ‘dialogic’, although it was possible to tease out generic principles. These included: the posing of genuine questions, using pupil answers as the fulcrum of the learning exchange, and transferring more of the responsibility for learning to the learner. There appears to be general consensus (Alexander, 2001, 2004; Nystrand, 1997; Skidmore, 2000; Wells, 1999) that dialogic teaching is drawn from the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and is situated within the sociocultural tradition of cognitive development where dialogue is viewed as the key to thinking and the formation of abstract concepts, and is conducted through a process of co-construction, and reformulation, of knowledge. What is not clear is how far the inclusion of one statement within a non-statutory curriculum document, and the failure to provide any additional guidance, will bring about a sea-change in classroom practice. A second crucial aspect drawn from the literature (particularly Lefstein, 2010, and Wegerif, 2008), is that dialogue is a messy and contentious business, and that for real learning to take place, it needs to be critical: to challenge accepted views and received knowledge. This challenge to the position of the teacher requires an epistemological shift which acknowledges that knowledge is not fixed; that ‘building to common understanding’, might not be that of the teacher, and more than promoting peer, or interactive, discussion is necessary for truly dialogic (many-voiced) exchanges.

It had been suggested in the preceding sections that the pre-existing beliefs and values of trainees are of great significance in developing teacher identity. Sexton’s (2007) study of role-identity identified five common factors cited by students in their negative memories of teachers. These factors (lack of passion about teaching; lack of relationships with
pupils; ‘just a job’; cruelty; a ‘talk and chalk’ teaching style) may well be linked to a classroom dominated by a recitation script, and where one voice alone did the talking. Where this talk-role is an abiding memory, it may form a template for practice which is difficult to transcend. However, even students who have had previous experience or employment in a classroom have their constructs challenged frequently during a postgraduate training course. Moore (2004, p. 41) refers to this in his discussion of the tensions of “endless move between dominant discourses” as students find themselves required to defend university approaches to teaching in the social context of home, or school, where teachers may be considered to be ‘born’ rather than created, and silent classrooms may be seen as ‘real’ learning environments. Such tensions can inevitably lead to confusion and anxiety. If Foucault’s (1980) definition of the naturalisation and concealment of discourse is considered at this point, then the student may well be caught between two competing, socially constructed, views. As Kress (1989, p. 10) explains, “the social will have been turned into the natural” when the discourse offers such a persuasive view of the subject that it is virtually impossible to conceive of a different view. The strength of the discourse – home/school versus university/theory is, therefore, also highly significant for the developing professional. How hard it is, therefore, to champion an approach to teaching, which may be vigorously rejected by the host school.

According to Pajares (1992) the long-standing assumption that pre-existing beliefs are deeply entrenched is supported by a wealth of empirical evidence. Any change in belief requires a challenge to core values which are often buried at an unconscious level, and often connected with wider beliefs about education and one’s role in society. Hargreaves (1998) sees teaching as an emotional business; he posits that when the teacher (or, in this case, student), comes from a different social background from their pupils, it is possible for them to misinterpret pupils’ “exuberance for hostility, bored compliance for studious commitment, embarrassment for stubbornness and silent respect for sullen resistance” (p. 839). This belief is of significance for teacher educators as we consider the student’s ability, or willingness, to engage in dialogue themselves, and to promote it in their classrooms. Brookfield (1990) discusses the transformative potential of students’ willingness to challenge their assumptions through negotiating professional identities within dialogic spaces. According to Moore (2004) such spaces exist in the area between
“pre-existing views and ideologies; the advice and teaching of others; practical circumstances and practice-based learning; and wider local and government policies”.

Those who are willing to experience the emotional ‘pain’ of such a transformation might be more willing to relinquish some level of control of classroom dialogue to their pupils.

As acknowledged previously, the role of the teaching practice mentor is an uneasy one. If the original depiction in Greek mythology identified a guardian, friend, guide and teacher, the current role also includes assessor and gatekeeper. The current TDA Standards for QTS require trainees to be able to be ‘innovative’, as follows:

Q8 Have a creative and constructively critical approach towards innovation, being prepared to adapt their practice where benefits and improvements are identified. (no page)

The ‘scope’ which elaborates on the Standard goes on to explain that, although much of the classroom context is new to students, they are expected to identify “skills, techniques and approaches to teaching that are successful and those that are not”. Included in this directive is a requirement to identify “innovative” practice, which they should adopt. There are a number of significant problems for the student teacher in attempting this. If the mentor is unable to articulate their practice, or unwilling to act as a critical friend, believing it the role of the university supervisor to do this, or if they themselves are struggling with the concept of dialogic teaching, then it is uncertain how the student is expected to identify, and adopt, innovative practice moving away from a recitation script towards ‘interthinking’.

Dillon (1994) questions what discourages us from using discussion, and goes on to answer the question himself, explaining that it is difficult, and has to be learned, further describing it as: “time-consuming, kaleidoscopically unpredictable in process, and uncertain of outcome as much as unsure of success” (p. 105). Expressed in that way, we might wonder why we dare to promote it as a teaching strategy, especially to novice teachers, and are perhaps unsurprised that he refers to teachers’ “poignant lack of experience and helpless lack of know-how”. In writing fourteen years ago, Dillon contended that discussion was not used because of the “antidialogical” culture of the school (p. 107), and listed the following factors:
• curriculum as content coverage;
• aims as tested outcomes
• teaching as management and control
• classroom interaction as question and answer recitation
• teacher authority and privilege
• overcrowded and competitive classrooms

Harrison (2006) suggests that is time to banish the quiet classroom, suggesting that it is oracy, rather than literacy, that engages learners. She does, however, acknowledge the perceived risk for many learners in articulating their emergent learning when they feel themselves at the mercy of the group. Perhaps if dialogic talk is viewed in the light of its Socratic roots: a dialectal process involving joint inquiry in the search for an, as yet, unknown answer, 'risk' might be viewed as not only positive, but also necessary, for learning. It can be speculated that the only possibility of creating an articulate, cognitively stimulating classroom lies in the teacher’s ability to position him/herself as a co-searcher.

In the same way that this chapter began with Barnes’ questions of 1976
Who has decided that patterns of talk are as they are?
How do these patterns change?
How do children and teachers learn them?
How does this actually contribute to learning?

We should, perhaps, question how far the culture of the school has changed since 1976; and further, if it is desirable, or possible, to change some aspects of this culture through Initial Teacher Education.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Concepts explored by the research question

Both the introduction and the literature review have attempted to tease out the varied and complex factors which interact in an almost infinite number of ways to shape the identity of beginning teachers. Despite the increasing ‘professionalisation’ of teaching, and government attempts to ensure ITT providers offer courses which are replicable, testable, and homogeneous, the culture, history, experiences and attitudes of trainees, tutors, mentors, and the entities we call ‘schools’ and ‘universities’, all play a part in creating this identity. They also determine how far students are willing to take a risk in the classroom; to widen their teaching strategies; to hand control of dialogue (ostensibly) to the children and to make the cognitive leap of uniting theory and practice in praxis. Of primary concern in this project, however, is how student teachers manage (or otherwise) curriculum innovation; this is inextricably bound up with their perceptions of what it is that they are expected to innovate.

This chapter sets out the methodological approaches used to investigate the principal research question ‘What influences student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk in the primary classroom?’ It provides an overview of the collaborative action research project, which, using an interpretive constructivist stance was conducted over 3 cycles with 3 successive cohorts of primary generalist postgraduate student teachers. Using a pattern of convenience-sample questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, Video Stimulated Reflective Dialogue (VSRD, Moyles et al, 2003) and lesson observation, 9 case studies were undertaken. It is hoped that this provides a rich picture of what it means to manage the demands of becoming a teacher, whilst attempting to develop dialogic talk. This is particularly significant, given the lack of any generally held understanding of the meaning of ‘dialogic’ in the context of primary literacy teaching.
3.1.1 An Interpretive approach to enquiry

Stenhouse (1981, p. 103) offers a minimalist definition of research as ‘systematic, self-critical enquiry’, adding that this is necessarily founded in curiosity, and sustained by a strategy. Research, it seems, must also be conducted in a spirit of doubt both about one’s hypotheses, and the evidence collected. The business of research is therefore centred on any effort towards a disciplined enquiry and should be conducted in the spirit of doubt both about one’s hypotheses, and the evidence collected. Within the tradition of social science research sit a number of paradigms, or first principles, which form belief-sets governing the process of such disciplined enquiry. According to Guba and Lincoln (2000) a paradigm encompasses the four dimensions of ethics, epistemology, ontology and methodology. These act together to enable the researcher to attempt the intricate process of balancing enquiry within a framework of questions about the nature of relationships between the researcher and subject, the nature of reality, and the best way of acquiring knowledge about the world. Geertz (1993, in Guba & Lincoln, 2000) asserts that there is increasingly a blurring of genres within methodological approaches and no longer can the researcher claim to engage in pure positivist or critical enquiry. As Schwandt (2000) argues, we appear to have increasingly labeled and categorised sophisticated and complex theoretical perspectives: yet it is not the labels which are of importance, but the shared issues of how we wish to conduct ourselves as researchers.

Careful consideration should be made of the families of methodological approach to empirical enquiry. From the start of the project, I rejected the scientific paradigm as inappropriate and took instead a constructivist-interpretive approach, working within a relativist ontology, acknowledging multiple constructed realities (Crotty, 2003); and interpretive-constructivist epistemology, suggesting that the knower and the known interact to reshape one another. Initially, I considered a phenomenological approach to coding the data relating to classroom dialogue. Marton and Booth (1997) explain that using this method of interpretation, outcomes are represented analytically as a number of different meanings, or ‘categories of description’ which attempt to distinguish the interpreted category from the represented hypothetical experience through the creation of an ‘outcome space’. This links with the ontological stance which rejects a dualistic view; the world as experienced is, therefore, seen as constituted through an internal
relationship between the learner and the world. According to Akerlind (2005), this relatively recent perspective has developed from an empirical basis, but suffered from a relative paucity of published discussion. Silverman (2006, p. 7), however, is particularly scathing about overcomplicating good qualitative research with “obscure philosophical positions such as hermeneutics and phenomenology” and this was a significant factor in my decision not to make any claim to use it.
3.1.2 Interpretive Constructivism: an epistemological stance

According to Bennett, Wood and Rogers (1997), a social constructivist approach to interpretative enquiry strives to explain how people make sense of phenomena, events, and the cultural and social world in which we find ourselves. Hepburn (cited in Jupp, 2006) adds that discourse, often at the heart of such research, is central in developing understanding of the world, and ourselves, adding that any account of the world is sustained by social processes rather than objective validity. Although Potter (1996) suggests a range of strategies for making descriptions more objective, for example corroboration and consensus of descriptions of events by independent witnesses, and ‘stake inoculation’ whereby the description runs counter to what one might expect from the participant, these were not adopted. The research design sought instead to ensure the data analysis was systematic and reliable by specifying, explicitly, the way in which the co-researchers were situated in the empirical world, and how they were connected to the relevant interpretive material. The use of ‘member check’ (examined more explicitly in section 3.4) was also of particular significance in working together with the trainees to interpret their actions in small group discussion. It also enabled teasing out of the interconnecting factors at pivotal moments when, for example, as the literature review suggests, the children might have been encouraged to pose questions for themselves, or their responses ‘chained’ and probed (Nystrand, 1997; Wells, 1999; Skidmore, 2000; Alexander, 2001, 2004). The methods, or strategies of enquiry, therefore, sought to connect the paradigm to the situational site of enquiry: action to praxis.

Schwandt (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) suggests that we are all constructivists if we share the notion that understanding is constructed, and continually retested, in the light of new experience. In undertaking research which examined conceptions of the role of dialogue in the construction of shared understanding, social constructivism was the most appropriate epistemological stance. Gergen’s (1994) definition of this philosophy as “an array of propositions, arguments, metaphors, narratives and the like” (p. 78) describes well the tentative and uncertain business of exploring transient and fragmentary oral exchanges between participants engaged in the business of learning. Although this research does not take a feminist stance, Longino’s (1993) proposition that data
gathered, organised and linked to a hypothesis are contextual, since they are influenced by the intersubjective background assumptions of the researcher, was persuasive. Similarly, critical discourse analysis was examined, and rejected, as a methodological approach since the principal focus of this research lies not directly with the power relationships inherent in oral exchanges, but in a wider web of contextual influences on the beginning teacher.

3.1.3 Reflexivity

The selection of an interpretive approach was intended to enable adoption of a strongly reflective and reflexive stance; this seemed particularly suited to a collaborative enterprise concerned with the interpretation of attitudes towards, and facility in promoting, dialogue. Reflexivity urges the researcher to look inwards and to be critically self-exploratory of any interpretation; it positions the researcher’s communication as an integral part of the knowledge, rather than an intervening variable. According to Wellington (2000:43), there is debate regarding the increasingly “confessional tone” of qualitative research; however, he considers a statement of the researcher’s “positionality” as essential. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge that the methods of data collection, and subsequent analysis, were inevitably shaped by my epistemological stance as a proponent of social constructivism, and influenced by two theoretical positions: first, the writings of Vygotsky, Bruner and Wells (amongst others) on the centrality of talk for learning; second, the work of writers such as Nystrand, Wegerif and Lefstein on dialogic talk.

It is evident that in asking why teachers and trainees behave as they do when conducting dialogue; what the consequences are for learning and motivation when task completion, rather than process, is often seen as the goal of education, and what could be done, or indeed should be done, to improve the situation, my position is clear. In assuming that the situation needed improving, it could be argued that I failed to question my own assumptions about the role of dialogue as a tool for cognitive development, and that any research undertaken was driven by this view. The justification for this, however, is twofold. First, the research evidence suggested that dialogue is key to learning in the
primary classroom (see Chapter 2). Secondly, my professional experience, both as a primary teacher, and as a university-based practice supervisor, suggested that students who were able to make purposeful use of such strategies as pair discussion, who encouraged children to pose questions, and who used children’s responses as the fulcrum of the learning exchange, were better able to encourage children to engage with their own learning.

Gilgun (2005) offers one of the most powerful reasons for the reflexive stance of this inquiry, suggesting that writings are co-constructions of interaction between research participants. In qualitative research, the perspectives and voices of all are needed to help form a more rounded picture of the situation, and this was sought particularly through the use of Video Stimulated Reflective Dialogue (see section 3.3.6). Flick (2009) refers to the need to develop inductive strategies in order to examine the context to be studied, since most phenomena are complex, and not capable of being extracted from context. Although theoretical perspectives (for example Alexander’s (2008) indicators of dialogic talk, and Moyles et al.’s (2003) ‘Characteristics of Concern’ were applied to the data, I remained open to unexpected, contradictory, or puzzling interpretations, and sought clarification from participants, through dialogue, throughout. It must be acknowledged, however, that it is impossible to adopt a totally neutral stance towards data, and the ultimate interpretation of the writing lies, as Cresswell (2007) suggests, with the reader.

3.1.4. Collaborative research

Literature (see for example, Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Geertz, 1993; Guba and Lincoln, 1994) suggests that mixed methods (strategies) may make complete sense within the same enquiry. Although each paradigm has notionally corresponding approaches and research methods, a researcher may adopt methods which cut across them; since phenomena are multidimensional, methodological determinism seems purposeless. It is appropriate here, therefore, to add that the involvement of students as co-researchers critically evaluating their own practice was underpinned by the principles of action research. Since students were to be involved as research partners, I turned first to the notion of participatory action research (PAR). Although a contested term, it has at its
heart the principle of collective, self-reflective inquiry. In its assumption that the nature of knowledge should be questioned, it offers affirmation that experience can be a basis of knowing and that experiential learning can lead to a legitimate form of knowledge that influences practice. Since action research is conducted by people who wish to improve their own station (McNamara, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Zuber-Skerritt, 1966; Sagor, 1992), it initially appeared to offer a framework within which the students were empowered to deconstruct and analyse their own practice. This form of inquiry is, however, often politically driven, and conducted in the context of third world, or disadvantaged communities; the southern tradition of emancipatory PAR in particular (Habermas, 1987; Kemmis, 2001; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2003; Reason and Bradbury, 2006) argues that such a process should empower people to have increased control over their lives.

This research makes no such claim and refers instead to Collaborative Action Research which concerns itself with ways of investigating experience in order to link theory and practice. This requires that the particular focus on learning and teaching is determined by practitioners, and that it is within the researchers’ scope to influence the focus. The literature suggests (Coughlin; 2007; Reason and Torbert, 2001) that central to PAR is a critical realist approach, challenging the researcher to develop rigorous epistemology and transcend their own subjectivity through the quality of data analysis. Having previously acknowledged my epistemological stance, I hope that these principles have informed my use of collaborative action research. Reason and Torbert (2001) suggest that experiential knowing, similar to Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) experiential and practical knowing, is central to developing empathy between collaborative research partners. This ‘knowing’, which is based on what is actually perceived to be there, also was central to the enquiry. It is important to state that I do not make any positivistic claims that the ‘problem’ of developing extended dialogue and higher-order thinking can be ‘resolved’ through logical analysis and argument; rather, that the issue of managing classroom talk is worthy of investigation; further, that this may be profitably explored through dialogue between the research partners.
3.2 Research Design

The principal research question, key to the enquiry, was devised through a detailed and systematic analysis of the main themes emerging from the literature review. As summarized in the closing section of Chapter 2, much of the literature questions the lack of change in practice in classroom talk over the last 40 years. It has, however, concerned itself with the literacy practices of qualified, and often experienced, teachers. This study examined the notions, beliefs, values and understandings that trainee teachers brought with them on entry to the profession, and questioned what, if anything, acted as a barrier to the promotion of pedagogical approaches explored and promoted at university. A number of subsidiary questions were further developed in order to dig further into meaning. These were as follows:

- How do students perceive the pedagogical and conceptual construct of dialogic talk?
- How do trainees implement dialogic talk in the classroom?
- What experiences influence their implementation?
- What attitudes influence their implementation?

Through engaging an a collaborative enquiry focussed on the above questions, I hoped that I would be enabled to achieve the following objectives:

- gain insight into the nature, and impact of values, attitudes and beliefs upon trainees’ practice
- gain a picture of trainees’ conceptual understanding of theoretical constructs, and their pedagogical rationale for practical application
- be able to construct a typology of dialogic teaching derived from trainees’ understanding of the term.
- examine trainees’ concerns about dialogic teaching and observe their management/engagement with it

Further, it was hoped that the students would be able to:
• develop a more informed understanding of dialogic talk and its role in promoting learning
• understand the importance of moving beyond a recitation script of IRF exchanges
• begin to use answers as the fulcrum of the learning exchange
• develop a more reflective, and reflexive, attitude towards their practice
• be helped to discuss their emerging philosophy of education in a more informed manner

The shortness of the course, a factor already acknowledged as significant in the literature review, meant that it was not possible to track a group of trainees over a longer period of time. It was therefore decided to run the project over three years, with three successive cohorts of postgraduate trainees, adjusting the taught course and research design and instruments after each cycle. It was hoped that a cyclical approach would allow the research question to be probed more deeply through the generation of rich and significant information. Further, that it would enable ‘digging deeper’ into trainees’ knowledge, perceptions, values, beliefs and pedagogical understandings than would have been possible through studying a single cohort. I felt this would also allow me to make adjustments to the course based on a better understanding of the differing needs of the students whilst at university, and within the placement classroom. To some extent, this addresses Greenwood and Levin’s (In Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 54) “cogenerative enquiry” through interaction between possessors of local knowledge (the classroom situation) and professional knowledge.

The research ‘pattern’, shown in detail in Fig. 3 (p. 70) comprised questionnaires, case study participant selection, semi-structured interviews; observation and discussion of practice, VSRD, (Video Stimulated Reflective Discussion, Moyle et al, 2003) and a final questionnaire and interview with each participant. This appeared to offer the most fruitful possibilities for amending course design, where necessary, in the light of feedback. A further significant decision concerned the selection of small group discussion, rather than whole class discussion, as a focus for analysis. Although much of the literature discusses the continuing issue of ‘interactive’ whole class teaching (see Chapter 2, section 2), I considered that if very experienced teachers were having difficulty managing discourse
with the whole class, it would prove even more difficult for students. With that in mind, the lens was focused on interactions with small numbers of pupils in the hope that this might prove more manageable; that it would be easier for them to develop a greater level of pupil autonomy, and, pragmatically, that the video recorder would be more likely to pick up all dialogue. This proved not only to be more practically manageable, but also allowed for closer focus on the discussion itself.

As indicated above, it was inevitable that the research design, although carefully considered at the very first stages of the project, would be subject to a number of changes as it progressed through three cycles. It is hoped that the evolution of the design demonstrates a reflective approach (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000); by this I mean that I endeavoured to interpret my interpretations, look at my perspectives from other perspectives and run a critical eye over my interpretation of the situation and the data. Each of the sections discussing the research instruments show clearly the adjustments made to each during the project.

It is acknowledged that there are a number of potential difficulties in analysing oral data. Initially (as indicated in 3.1.2 above), critical discourse analysis was considered as a methodological approach, however, although it offered possibilities for examining language use, as van Tijk (1998) suggests, its central concern is the potential for control, and the way that social power abuse and dominance are enacted. As this appeared too narrow a lens to focus on the complex web of classroom interaction, a generally inductive approach (Bryman & Burgess, 1994) was selected. It was hoped that this would allow the raw data to be condensed into a more accessible summary; to show clear links between the research objectives and summary findings, and allow development of a theory about the experiences evident in the data.

According to Thomas (2003), inductive approaches have some commonality with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in that research findings emerge through the dominant themes in the data. This eliminates to some degree the danger of key themes being overlooked in the application of more structured methodologies, or deductive data analysis. By beginning with close readings of the text, and considering carefully the
multiple meanings which may be derived from it, it is possible to move from raw data into a large number of ‘coded’ categories, and thence into a smaller number of categories which capture the essence of the case. In this project, it was hoped to identify issues which lay at the heart of students’ identities/roles as ‘talk teachers’, and how their histories, values and beliefs impacted upon this.

The table below sets out the final research design, reflecting all the methodological adjustments which were made over the 3 cycles, and is foregrounded to provide a context for the methodological discussion which follows.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-question</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Research instrument</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is ‘dialogic’ defined; what does literature have to say about trainees’ pedagogic development?</td>
<td>Systematic literature review</td>
<td>Open response reflective writing about talk.</td>
<td>Convenience group PGCE primary trainees</td>
<td>Journals, books and other related literature</td>
<td>Analytical review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is trainees’ pedagogical understanding of dialogic talk?</td>
<td>Initial reflection</td>
<td>VSRD using semi-structured interview &amp; reflective framework</td>
<td>9 trainees</td>
<td>Purposive – chosen for contrasting standpoints</td>
<td>Inductive analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do trainees begin to evaluate the balance of talk?</td>
<td>Video, e-mail informal discussion</td>
<td>Observation frame</td>
<td>9 trainees</td>
<td>Purposive</td>
<td>Inductive analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do trainees implement dialogic talk in the classroom?</td>
<td>Video, lesson observation &amp; interviews</td>
<td>VSRD using semi-structured interview &amp; reflective framework</td>
<td>9 trainees</td>
<td>Purposive – chosen for contrasting standpoints</td>
<td>Inductive analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What experiences and attitudes influence their implementation?</td>
<td>Initial reflection</td>
<td>Open response reflective writing about talk.</td>
<td>One cohort 75 trainees</td>
<td>Convenience group PGCE primary trainees</td>
<td>Inductive analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far are trainees able to identify and improve dialogic pedagogy within their own practice?</td>
<td>VSRD</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview schedule</td>
<td>9 trainees</td>
<td>Purposive – chosen for contrasting standpoints</td>
<td>Inductive analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3: Final research design
3.2.1 Working with multiple data sets

According to Mason (1995), in qualitative case studies, research methods may be combined through methodological triangulation as a way of corroborating the data. This implies that we may obtain a ‘true’ understanding of the situation by seeking the intersection of, for example, interview and observational data though a process of ‘overlaying’. This has clear links to the vexed question of reliability, explored further in section 3.4.1 however, as Silverman (1993) cautions, if we conceive reality as socially constructed, and context-dependent, then no one ‘phenomenon’ can be applied to all cases. We need to be aware of the naiveté inherent in a search for ultimate ‘truth’ through triangulation. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) warn, collection of multiple sources of data can create, rather than solve, problems in reaching understanding. A common misconception, for example, when working with multiple sources is to under-investigate the original dataset. As Silverman (2000, p.100) suggests "simplicity and rigour” are preferable to “an illusory search for the ‘full picture’”. To the novice researcher, this does not sit easily with Yin’s (2003) recommendation that good case-study research requires at least six different types of information. In Postmodern approaches to research, validity is sought through the process of crystallisation; rather than working with a fixed, two-dimensional model, hoping to find a central ‘truth’, a crystal acts as a prism. Here there are multiple viewpoints; what we see depends on our angle and there can be no single truth. This multi-faceted structure produces deep, yet complex, and particularly partial understanding. Different perspectives might point in similar directions, but are unlikely to converge at a point of reality. The initial stages of the research were tentative in nature, since it was anticipated that the findings of the questionnaire, the first research instrument, would play a large part in determining what was to follow.

3.2.2 Case studies

It is well documented (Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Diamond, 1996; Dogan & Pelassey, 1990) that case study research is often considered to be less valuable than other, more scientific methods, and that it is too subjective and cannot provide generalisable results. However, each of the 9 participants was not viewed as a ‘typical’ individual case study. (Denscome, 2003); they were seen instead as individuals demonstrating contrasting, or
maximum variation, of opinion. As Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, looking at difference in one or more dimension can provide more information about the significance of individual circumstances. Each had two linking factors: a prior degree, and engagement in the process of becoming teachers, but very different beliefs about the talk role of the teacher. The use of a case study approach was therefore selected to direct the spotlight on the particular in order to further illuminate the general – to gain insights which might have wider implications for the researcher. It also provided an opportunity to study in detail, and discuss, instances which might not have been possible through using a larger sample. The focus was on the interconnected relationships and processes found in the complex circumstances bound up in learning and teaching. Detailed attention has therefore been given to the processes by which the data was obtained, coded and analysed; the natural setting in which this was obtained, and the multiple sources and methods used to investigate relationships and events. Hammersley (1992) explains this succinctly thus:

The concept of case study captures an important aspect of the decisions we face in research. It highlights, in particular, the choices we have to make about how many cases to investigate and how those are to be selected.

p 184-5.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the naturalistic perspective asserts that the inquirer and respondent[s] are interrelated in a circle of multiple constructed realities; there is no need to seek generalisation, but to describe a body of knowledge which describes individual cases. The ‘phenomenon’, the nature of the relationship between individual students and dialogic talk in their respective classrooms, could only be understood in its setting. I therefore suggest that it was possible to make comparative judgements and to support them with persuasive arguments, based on supporting evidence drawn from interviews, non-participant observation and from the process of content analysis. The central beliefs, which underpinned this research, were that observation cannot be neutral; that evidence cannot be independent from theoretical frameworks, acknowledged or otherwise, and that there is no permanently ‘fixed’ reality which needs no interpretation.
On a final note, the work of Stronach and MacLure (1997) on postmodernism must be acknowledged. This research offers a ‘privileged’ reading; it presents evidence shaped and controlled by the author and the reader has no alternative but to accept the interpretation I put upon the findings. The findings are, however, offered in the spirit of ambivalence, rather than as an uncritical acceptance of prevailing ideologies.

### 3.2.3 Ethical and Political Considerations

Schwandt (2000) suggests that social enquiry is a practice; from this it is possible to deduce that any attempt to interpret the acts of others inevitably involves moral commitment. There has been a proliferation of ethical codes which attempt to ensure participants are not harmed, that their privacy is respected, and that they are not deceived about the aims of the research. This is particularly important in qualitative research, since it is often an open process in which outcomes are not known at the start. As qualitative researchers study things in their ‘natural’ settings and attempt to make sense of them, the inductive nature of this research indeed precluded total anticipation of all complications and issues which arose ‘in the field’. Particular attention was paid, however, to Flick’s (2009) writing on the ethical issues a researcher faces at every stage of the research process.

First, the issue of informed consent: this raises the question of the power dimension between university supervisor and trainee teacher which might have made it difficult for participants to withdraw from the project. Newkirk (1996) uses the emotive phrase ‘seduction and betrayal’ to describe the way they may be set up after giving informed consent; a concept better suited to medical research from whence the term was borrowed. As Malone (2003) cautions, participants sometimes mistake the level of power and influence they will have in collecting and interpreting the data.

The second significant ethical issue related closely to the first: the relationship between trainees and researcher. I openly acknowledge the ethical implications of conducting collaborative action research with students who perceived themselves (incorrectly) as dependent upon me to appraise, and assess, their practice for competence towards the
QTS Standards. After carefully considering the ethical implications, I decided that it would not be appropriate to act as both researcher and supervisor.

Prus (1996) and Denzin (1994) offer contrasting visions of the ethical researcher; for Prus, she is “chameleon-like” (p. 196) in her unobtrusiveness, whilst Denzin favours a “newer, gentler, compassionate gaze which looks, and desires, not technical instrumental knowledge, but in-depth existential understandings” (p. 64). It is hoped that this compassionate gaze was achieved through a more obvious involvement with the participants. A significant aspect of the project was that this collaborative research did not position the participants as ‘people to do research on’, but as research partners. It might be argued that, through participating in research, the students would alter their practice, and thus there would be no possibility of grasping what was ‘truly’ going on in classrooms. The ultimate aim of research, however, ought to be improving education: it is, therefore, a good thing if participants do change their practice as an outcome of participating.

The third issue concerned the process of data collection. This had the capacity to provoke a crisis of confidence in the trainee teachers who might have seen the presence of a researcher, albeit a collaborative one, as threatening. Whilst it was hoped that this collaborative venture in deconstructing practice was empowering, it must not be forgotten that my role as a non-participant observer was potentially intrusive. There was also the possibility that a student might wish to discuss with me significant problems related to the placement, rather than the project. I am unable to claim that my research was ‘unobtrusive’; however, I held open discussions with the participants in which I was honest about the purpose of the research, and the way in which they might see a link with the following QTS Standards (TDA, 2007):

Q7: Reflect on and improve their practice
Q8: Be prepared to adapt their practice where benefits and improvements are identified
Q9: Act on advice and feedback, and be open to coaching and mentoring
Fourthly, I was aware that any judgements made in analysing the data might have caused participants to view themselves in a different light. The literature review drew attention to the work of Bourdieu (1986) on cultural capital and the cautionary note sounded by Lambirth (2006) about the generally accepted practice of setting ground rules for talk (Corden, 2000; Mercer, 2000; Grugeon et al., 2001). Rules, he suggests, fail to address dilemmas over equality and alienation and leave teachers in danger of: “reaffirming and legitimising the inequalities that exist between the discourses and consequent social structures of society” (p. 63). With this in mind, I remained alert to the possibility of imposing, and only valuing, my own historical and ideological values during the coding and analysis of data.

The final factor, confidentiality in writing up the findings, raised two main issues; first the importance of ensuring that participants were not identifiable to other members of the profession, and secondly, the need to keep data secure with an agreed date for destruction of the videoed evidence.

According to Pring (2001) no one set of principles, or ethical code, can ever completely shape the decisions to be made in every research context. Principles, therefore, have to be considered in the light of the situation, however unclear this might be. Some things were anticipatable, for example the danger that a trainee might withdraw from the course during the project, or a school withdraw its consent for video recording. Indeed, this was the case with three participants and two schools in Cycle 3.
3.3 Research Instruments

The mixed methods selected for data collection were drawn from a tradition of interpretative, and critical, research and although the decision to begin with a questionnaire is viewed by many (for example, Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Gray, 2004) as unusual in action research, it is often central to interpretative enquiry.

3.3.1 questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Research instrument</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 March 2008</td>
<td>Initial questionnaire</td>
<td>Questionnaire: attitudes &amp; sentiments towards talk. Likert scale</td>
<td>Group 25 PG trainees</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Sept 2008</td>
<td>Initial &amp; end open response questionnaire</td>
<td>Open response questionnaire, Whole cohort 75 PG trainees</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sept 2009</td>
<td>Initial open response writing</td>
<td>Open response reflective writing about talk</td>
<td>Whole cohort 75 PG trainees</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 4: Changes to the questionnaire design

Initially in the project its use was designed solely to identify a potential purposive sample with a range of views about the use of dialogue, not as an instrument to promote collaborative reflection. Since the data were to be examined for attitudes towards talk, it was considered that following Oppenheim’s (1992) suggestion, asking attitude-based questions using a 5 point Likert scale would offer useful information. The ideas the questionnaire set out to probe related to a number of key theoretical issues identified by the literature. The questions were underpinned by both the social constructivist theories of Bruner and Vygotsky regarding the importance of dialogue as a tool for developing cognition, and by dialogic theory. In particular, they drew on Alexander’s (2001) assertion that talk is often perceived as social rather than cognitive; secondly, Bahrklin’s notion of ‘pedagogical dialogue’ in which the ignorant are instructed in the truth; thirdly, Barnes’ (1976) writing on teacher talk as knowledge transmission, and finally, Galton (1980) and Edwards and Mercer’s (1983) assertion that talk, and questioning, remains under the tight control of the teacher.
Cycle 1 began in March 2008 with the issue of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to a convenience sample of 25 generalist postgraduate trainees with a mix of age, gender, educational background and degree subject (see fig. 10, p.114). Group members were nearing the end of their course, but had not yet undertaken their final teaching practice. It was hoped that analysis would provide a picture of the varied range of beliefs and attitudes held by group members about classroom talk; also that it would allow me to ascertain what, if anything, they understood about dialogic teaching, and what their attitudes were towards collaborative group work. This clearly did not provide a picture of the views of students at the start of the course. The intention in collecting data at the point at which they would receive no further teaching, or opportunity to engage in theoretical debate, was to obtain a broad-brush picture. This would then enable identification of three collaborative participants with a range of views on the use of talk. In the event, it was not possible to identify a purposive sample for case study, despite successful piloting the questions with a different set of trainees. This is explored in the following paragraph.

Questionnaires are notoriously fraught with difficulty (Gillham, 2000; Gray, 2004), not only because of the difficulty in phrasing questions which are precise, but also because respondents may answer flippantly, misunderstand the questions or give inaccurate answers. Czaja and Blair (1996) also warn that scoring questions on a continuum is problematic, since decisions have to be made about issues such as the scale (high, medium and low rankings). It has been acknowledged in this chapter that the research inevitably reflects the researcher’s ontology, and as such, any questions do the same. In the event, analysis of the data indicated that it was not the best instrument to allow identification trainees with a range of views about classroom talk. The main problems were a clustering of responses around a neutral stance and the addition of extra columns by some respondents. Further analysis was regarded as fruitless, although the feedback on the questionnaire design, which was later amended for Cycle 2, was useful. The data obtained is analysed further in Chapter 4, but at this point it is acknowledged that only one participant was approached to become the first case study research partner.
3.3.2 The open response questionnaire

The format of the questionnaire was altered considerably before Cycle 2 (Appendix 2), which began at the commencement of the autumn term, 2008. According to Cresswell (2007) this process of reflexivity is central to the emergence of the research design since a plan cannot be tightly and rigidly drawn up at the start. Key to qualitative research is the notion of readjusting the theoretical lens, changing the questions and modifying the sites as the researcher enters the field.

An unforeseen change related to sample size. Although a convenience sample of 25 students (one entire group) had been selected to complete the questionnaire, an unexpected timetable change necessitated it being completed by the whole cohort (75 students). The completely redesigned instrument was issued to the convenience sample after their pre-course experience, but before their first seminars or teaching practice. This was to ensure that the answers given would be, as far as possible, based on personal belief, rather than espoused theory. The open response questionnaire contained fewer, but more open, questions which still drew on the key social constructivist and dialogic theory discussed in the literature review, and more space was provided for respondents to write (see Appendix 2). In particular, the revisions were designed to probe pre-existing values, beliefs and memories of talk or discussion from childhood experience at school: an area which had been ineffectively explored in Cycle 1. It was also hoped to elicit understanding of how talk was currently used in the classroom, and the teacher’s role as an ‘orchestrator’ of talk. Their views and understanding of the nature of knowledge, linked to research on epistemological development were also probed, and their need to conform to the implicit values and ethos of the school the statement “The teacher’s main role in group work is to ask questions to check up on knowledge” from Cycle 1 had produced the widest range of responses, it was simply rephrased to allow students to explain in their own words how they viewed the talk role of the teacher. It was hoped to avoid ‘leading’, whilst still raising issues that the literature review suggested were key to the use of dialogue.

The anticipated drawback of collecting rich and complex data (Denscombe, 2003; Gillham, 2000) is the potential difficulty of analysis, however, it was considered that the
construction of a coding frame would address this issue. Initially, data from the whole cohort on some of the emerging themes were analysed, and then the questionnaires from a convenience sample of 25 carefully coded. A detailed analysis of the themes and concepts gathered from the data is presented in Chapter 5.

3.3.3 End questionnaire

Cycle 2 concluded with the completion of an amended version of the original open response questionnaire by the convenience sample (Appendix 3). The question on aspects of English enjoyed at school was replaced with one probing memories of talk. Two extra questions were added to explore how far the input on dialogic talk during the English sessions at university might have impacted on practice. This was intended to establish if there had been significant (not in the statistical sense) changes in the students’ attitudes towards talk, and also to ascertain if there was a difference between the type of change demonstrated by the collaborative participants and the whole group. It was hoped that there might be evidence of deeper reflection, and possibly some challenge to their previous ontology and epistemology. It was also hoped there might be evidence of a deeper understanding of the theoretical aspects of dialogic talk. The additional questions were as follows:

- Reflect back on your own primary education: what are your memories of the way that talk was used?
- What do you understand by ‘dialogic talk’?
- Have you used dialogic talk in your teaching? (yes/no)
- If ‘no’, why?
- If ‘yes’, how?

In practice, time and attendance constraints rendered the data from the end questionnaire unhelpful. Many students did not return to university for their two allocated days at the end of the final placement for a variety of reasons (for example, school visits, job interviews, illness); those who did complete them wrote very little, possibly due to ‘questionnaire overload’. I took the decision to remove this instrument from the next cycle and obtain exit data solely through the VSRD episodes with case study students. At this point, I note with wry amusement Grant’s (2007) earnest assertion that the process of
action research is not smooth, and that in working at multiple levels, we need to value the richness and variety of our experiences, and not regard deviations from the planned tidy cycles as failures.

3.3.4 Reflective writing

In practice, obtaining data from the entire cohort had provided a wealth of rich and useful data, but it was, yet again, clear that even the open response questionnaire had failed to elicit any mention of talk, be it discussion, debate, drama, storytelling or performance poetry, as an enjoyable aspect of English. As one of the objectives of the research was to investigate student teachers’ attitudes towards talk, and how far prior experience and values impacted upon this, the questionnaire needed further adjustment for the final cycle.

In Cycle 3, which began in September 2009, the initial questionnaire was replaced with a piece of reflective writing about students’ talk histories designed to form a part of a larger personal literacy biography (Appendix 4). Despite the large amount of data generated, it was decided to again gather this from the entire cohort; the convenience sample of 75 was asked to read an extract from a children’s novel, then to write about their own memories of talk in the primary school. This provided a rich and powerful source of personal, and often painful, memories of talk at school. Inductive analysis was conducted on the text returned by the cohort, breaking it down into manageable categories. This process is regarded as a particularly rich and meaningful technique for qualitative analysis (Krippendorf, 2004) as it allows the researcher to become more deeply immersed in the data.

Responses were initially coded according to the five general prompts which had been devised using dialogic theory: Opportunities for debate and collaborative discussion; Who led the discussion; Questioning; Opportunities to question and challenge peers and the teacher; Putting up your hand. They were then re-coded inductively into the main themes suggested by responses, and then into concepts. The key concepts which emerged included a lack of recall of any aspects of talk; the teacher’s management or domination
of discussion; positive and negative experiences of talk; opportunities for collaborative learning and debate; questioning as the remit of the teacher; predominance of teacher input followed by individual or silent work, and the relationship between talk and behaviour management. Although inductively coded, the concepts related closely to theoretical perspectives raised in the literature review; they are explored more fully in Chapter 6.

### 3.3.5 Semi-structured interviews

In each research cycle, following the analysis of questionnaire data and selecting case study research participants, I used semi-structured interviews to probe their responses further. Paraphrasing a larger advert, Wellington (2000, p.71) states that “interviews can reach the parts which other methods cannot reach”; it allows the researcher to elicit views, impressions, prejudices and perspectives. It does not seek to uncover an objective ‘truth’, but to gain a better understanding of the interviewee’s viewpoint. Although I was aware that I brought my background knowledge and conceptions about the importance of dialogue to the interviews, I endeavoured to give the interviewees a voice through acting as a recorder and prober, and by being flexible about the direction in which they wished to take the discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Research instrument</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tape-recorded</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>1 trainee</td>
<td>Purposive</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 2</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Research instrument</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tape-recorded</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>3 trainees</td>
<td>Purposive</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 3</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Research instrument</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tape-recorded</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>5 trainees</td>
<td>Purposive</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig 5: Interview schedule**

Interviews, although time-consuming, can make explicit things which are tacit, and for inductive analysis, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe more effectively. Fontana and Frey (2000) remind us that this tool is not neutral; rather it is an active interaction which, it is hoped, will result in a negotiated, contextually based outcome. The design of a semi-structured interview requires careful thought. Acting in the
capacity of researcher and university tutor, it is difficult to state absolutely that the
participants felt able to respond openly and honestly to questions about their (possibly
naïve) assumptions about dialogue. Oppenheim (1992) refers to rapport between
interviewer and participant as an elusive quality, cautioning that an impression may be
created by the dress and language of the researcher; it was hoped that this particular set
of factors would not be a barrier to meaning creation, and that students might perceive
themselves as fellow professionals – even if at an early stage of such a status. An
interview may be perceived as relating more to a search for credibility than for validity and
reliability, and these concepts are examined in more detail in sections 3.5. and 3.5.1
below, but this may be linked to the plausibility of the researcher’s actions and analysis.
Arksey and Knight (1999) further suggest it may be addressed by phrasing questions
unambiguously, and not hesitating to halt the interview to ask a question designed to
refocus the answer.

In each case, after obtaining the necessary permissions, I was able to gather rich data by
using semi-structured interviews to probe the attitudes expressed in the
questionnaire/reflection. A data recorder was used to ensure dialogue was captured
accurately, and to allow a more informal encounter to take place. The data was
transcribed verbatim, and sent to each participant for comment afterwards. A literature
review of articles and texts on this subject (for example, Arksey and Knight, 1999;
Fontana and Frey, 2000; Gray, 2004; Oppenheim, 1992; Patton, 1990; Silverman, 1997;
Wengraf, 2001) indicates that the shifting from product (questionnaire) to process can
provide a powerful tool for collecting rich data on the views, attitudes and meanings that
underpin behaviours. Concepts probed by the interview were suggested by themes,
values and memories drawn from the questionnaires, and the central issues such as
teacher questioning, class control, and imparting information, identified by literature
review. Although precise questions could not be determined in advance, prompts were
devised; the way these were phrased, however, depended on the way participants
expanded on their questionnaire answers. It must be acknowledged that this lack of
anonymity might have resulted in responses which were not as ‘open’ as imagined, and
even that they had been phrased to match the supposed preferences of the researcher.
This is fully acknowledged as a limitation of the study. The responses to the questions are presented and analysed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

All interviews began with one key question to act as a trigger: ‘What do you feel about the place of talk in the classroom?’ This became a ‘launch pad’ for the exchange, and pre-prepared questions, which, in Cycle 1 simply rephrased the questionnaire statements. The prompts for the revised open response questionnaire used in Cycle 2 (presented below), can clearly be seen to be based upon social constructivist and dialogic theory, in particular, Vygotsky’s cautions regarding imparting concepts, and those of Bruner and Mercer (1995) on the co-construction of knowledge. They also probed the concerns raised in the literature review about the influence of pre-existing beliefs, values and attitudes:

- Do you remember how talk was used in your classroom at primary school? (Designed to elicit: 1. anything which the student may not have recognised as significant, for example, discussing work with another pupil, 2. if dialogue talk took place, but the student did not enjoy it)

- What sort of discussion did you see in your pre-course placement? (This was to ascertain, possibly through elicitation of the class teacher’s comments, or class rules, what was felt about the place of dialogue; further, to see if this created a sphere of influence before the course was begun)

- Do you think teacher’s role is mainly to check up on knowledge when working with a small group? (Careful phrasing was required here, but important to uncover genuine thoughts since the dialogic aspect of talk is decidedly not to do this)

- Do you think children are able to learn better when the room is quiet? (Designed to probe from another angle thoughts on the part dialogue can play in learning.)
Would you say that imparting your knowledge to children is the key to successful teaching (Again, needed careful wording so respondent was not lead, but could offer clues to their ontology and epistemology which may influence the way that they promote dialogue)

In Cycle 3, more open prompts based on the reflective writing were asked as necessary. Again, these were based solely upon participants’ responses and designed simply to allow them to elaborate on their views and opinions. It was explained that I was seeking to explore further the answers they had provided, and that I was not looking for ‘correct’ responses, but simply to understand their views about the ways teachers set up their classrooms for learning. In effect, the reflective writing acted, in itself, a prompt; as a form of preparatory stimulated recall ‘interview’.

Parsons (1984) differentiates between prompting, which he views as dangerous, and leading to bias, and probing to seek elaboration or clarification, although as Maykut and Morehouse (1995) warn, over probing can also result in bias. I believe that a strength of the interview process was its reflexivity; interviewees felt free to question exactly what was meant by some of the terms, for example discourse and collaborative work, and I felt able to request elaboration without fear of intimidating the interviewees. I was aware, however, that Kvale (2006) refers to an interview, however ‘warm’, as an uneven relationship ‘ruled’ by the interviewer. The interview schedule was kept to approximately 30 minutes to avoid fatigue, and, as stated above, with the permission of participants, the naturally expressed evidence (Stenhouse, 1978) tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and sent to them later for verification and comment. As Woods (1986) reminds us, this process helps to ensure that relevant points have been captured, and enables interviewees to add any useful comments. In Cycle 3, one of the participants did request that 2 ‘unprofessional’ comments she felt she had made be removed from the transcript. Although the questionnaire was amended for Cycle 2, and again for Cycle 3, the interview format remained essentially the same, probing the responses given by participants, and beginning with the same key question.
The interview data was inductively analysed using Alexander’s (2008) principles of dialogic teaching as a theoretical framework to obtain a general picture of the participants’ epistemological stance, and current perception of the teacher’s talk role. This was compared to the data obtained from the questionnaires to check for unexpected differences or contradictions.

3.3.6 Video Stimulated Reflective Dialogue (VSRD)

The third principal method of data collection was the use of VSRD (video stimulated reflective dialogue). This approach to analysis of practice has a history in continuing professional development (for example, Brookfield, 1998) in eliciting teachers’ thinking, feeling and actions with the aim of developing active learning through critical reflection on practice. A number of sources (amongst others, Lyle, 2003; Maclean and White, 2007; Marland, in Zuber-Skerritt, 1984; Moyle et al, 2003; Powell, 2005; Rhine & Bryant, 2007) explain this as a development from VSR (video stimulated recall), an essentially introspective process, and IPR (Interpersonal Process Recall), a method used principally for training mental health professionals. VSRD is now conceptualised as a process of collaborative enquiry between research partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Research instrument</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 minute teaching episode, final TP</td>
<td>Video discussion using VSRD</td>
<td>1 PG trainee</td>
<td>Purposive</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Cycle 2 | a. 5 minute video of talk & e-mail discussion, TP 1  
|         | b. e-mail reflection by trainee             | a. Basic analysis frame                         | 3 PG trainees| Purposive   | Inductive|
|         | c. 20 minute teaching episode, final TP      | b. Open reflection                              |             |             |          |
|         |                                             | c. Semi-structured Interview using amended VSRD reflection frame |             |             |          |
| Cycle 3 | a. 5 minute video of talk & e-mail discussion TP 1  
|         | b. 20 minute teaching episode, final TP      | a. Basic analysis frame                         | 5 PG trainees | Purposive   | Inductive|
|         |                                             | b. Semi-structured Interview using amended VSRD reflection frame |             |             |          |

Fig 6: VSRD schedule
The video episode was used as a stimulus for discussion focusing on specific aspects of each participant’s practice (in this case, dialogic talk) scaffolded by the tutor research partner. This project used questions based on Moyles’ (2003) framework of conceptual thinking to scaffold dialogue; this draws upon the work of Hatton and Smith (1997) which is, in turn, rooted in the work of Habermas (1973, in Moyles et al. 2003).

As posited in the literature review, developing a positive teaching identity appears crucial in determining how successful students will be in widening their teaching repertoire to use techniques which, although recommended by a university course, are not generally seen in practum. Maclean and White’s (2007) study of Australian trainee teachers’ identity, following an action reflection cycle, also used VSRD in order to focus on pedagogy through multiple layers of reflection. Their conclusions suggest that the combined use of video and scaffolded reflection can enable students to construct a collective identity; an individual identity and a social identity through the shared understandings of what it means to be a teacher. Similarly, Rhine and Bryant (2007, p.346) “sought to use technology to bridge this gap between academic preparation and school-based field experiences”. Both studies referred to the work of Schon (1990) which suggests that what distinguishes beginning teachers from ‘experts’ is the ability to think about what they are doing when they are doing it; that is, the habits of mind developed through reflection in action. It was hoped that reflecting on action, revisiting the experience, might develop this ‘invisible’ skill and allow consideration of alternative decisions which might have been reached. This, in turn, might help to develop the process of reflection in action.

One of the commonly agreed aspects of dialogic talk appears to be connected to the use of wait time. Although the use of video as a tool to aid insightful reflective discussion appeared to be well grounded in research (Kamens, 2000; McIntyre et al., 1996; Miels, 1999; Rhine and Bryant, 2007; Sherin, 2000), I felt some reservations about each student watching it immediately after the lesson observation. Where ‘wait time’ is used, research (Atwood, 1991; Mansfield, 1996) indicates that allowing participants time to think about what they wish to say increases the length and quality of the response, thus fostering higher cognitive learning. VSRD, according to the literature previously examined, is well suited to naturalistic research. In turn, naturalistic research is well suited to teaching
(Beach, 1997; Lyle, 2003), since it is concerned with the messy business of loosely
defined problems, uncertain, yet dynamic, environments, multiple participants and
multiple goals, and gathers data from a ‘naturalistic’ setting using, amongst other
techniques, verbal ‘think aloud’. Data may be analysed through content analysis and
compared with themes emerging from questionnaire and interview data.

A number of potential problems in using video data must be acknowledged, however. The
students, for example, may well have had differing levels of confidence in working with
technology. It is notoriously difficult to capture group talk, therefore decisions needed to
be made about what to record, and from where. In Cycle 1, the original idea of ‘sampling’
5 minutes of whole class talk, and 5 minutes of group discussion had to be replaced by
filming 15 to 20 minutes of group discussion, given the pragmatic difficulties of
remembering to turn the camera on and off. Tapes needed to be ‘zeroed’ and labeled to
facilitate discussion and recordings examined where necessary to verify less audible
sections of talk. Not least, my own ontology and epistemological stance had to be
considered since this inevitably coloured any observation of ‘dialogue’, and as previously
stated, I was clearly looking for evidence of the ability to understand, and use dialogic
principles. Lyle (2003) acknowledges that most studies treat any form of stimulated recall
as unproblematic, but cautions that there are significant limitations in incorporating it into
research design. Best practice, he suggests, should ensure the researcher strives to
reduce the anxiety of the participants and does not convey an impression of judgmental
probing.

In each cycle, the interview/discussion began with a joint re-reading of the original
rationale for the process of VSRD and reflective dialogue. It outlined this as an
exploration of intentions, assumptions about dialogic talk itself, and experience of the
lesson. It further clarified the importance of understanding that the process would
challenge knowledge, views and actions, and stressed that the intention was to enable
participants to develop their practice in promoting dialogic talk. The prompts for the
interview and dialogue were adapted from Moyles et al.’s (2003) investigation of
interactive teaching in which they reworked the CBAM (Concerns-Based Adaptation
Model), originally developed by Fuller (1969) in his identification of three main phases of
trainee teachers’ concerns about teaching (that is, self, task and content), and extended by Hall et al (1979, in Moyles et al, 2003) to produce a ‘stages of concern’ matrix regarding teachers’ use of innovations in practice (Appendix 5).

The ‘conceptual thinking/characteristics of concern’ matrix needed very little reworking to alter the focus from interactive teaching to dialogic talk; this provided an opportunity to probe participants’ conceptual understanding of dialogic talk; opinions about the aims and purposes of using it in the classroom, any concerns about its use, and the extent to which they believed it to be embedded in practice. After the interview, each participant was asked to select significant passages from the videoed lesson, stopping at places which they felt were important, and that they wished to discuss. The Reflective Framework (Appendix 6), used in conjunction with the participants’ selection of video clips, was designed to dig deeper into meaning. Again, the questions needed little adjustment to focus on dialogic talk. An audio recording of both reflective interviews was made, transcribed verbatim, and sent to participants for comment.

The data from the two-part reflections were analysed using the amended conceptual thinking/characteristics of concern matrix, and Alexander’s (2008) principles of dialogic teaching, to address the main, and subsidiary, research questions. These are represented below:

- What influences student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk in the classroom?
- How do students perceive the pedagogical and conceptual construct of dialogic talk?
- How do trainees implement dialogic talk in the classroom?
- What experiences influence their implementation?
- What attitudes influence their implementation?
3.3.7 VSRD Cycle 1

In the first cycle, the VSRD episode took place with the participant during his final teaching practice. The interview questions (fig. 7 below) elicited his affective, cognitive and behavioural views of dialogic teaching, and it was unnecessary to probe more deeply as he explained fully, backtracking and elaborating where he felt a need for greater clarity. These were therefore retained without further changes for the remaining cycles. The ‘Levels of Use’ grid (Appendix 5) was also shared, and the participant invited to situate himself upon it. This was then compared with my evaluation of his level of use of dialogic talk. The ‘Characteristics of Concern’ grid (see Appendix 5) was not made available, but used as a tool in conjunction with the interview data to place the participant as accurately as possible upon it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual understanding of dialogic talk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In your view, what is dialogic talk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you consider to be the aims and purposes of dialogic talk?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your attitude to dialogic talk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have concerns about promoting or facilitating dialogic talk?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How knowledgeable do you feel about dialogic talk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far do you employ strategies for promoting dialogic talk at the moment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What influences your promotion of dialogic talk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your promotion of dialogic talk changed since your first TP?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your view, what, if any, are useful alternatives to dialogic talk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any other comments to make?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 7: Interview questions**

The Reflective Framework, although provided in advance of the meeting, proved to be too detailed, with the participant indicating that he felt the need to make significant comments about each of the cells as he manipulated the video. At this point, it was decided to continue to make the framework available, but for clarity, to add a list of basic question prompts based upon it. This pattern was followed in Cycle 2 and 3. In each case, it was not necessary, or desirable, to ask all the questions since the nature of dialogue inevitable involves backtracking, boundary crossing and repetition in different contexts. It did prove to be simpler and more effective to use than the original version.
3.3.8 Introduction to VSRD Cycle 2 and 3

In Cycles 2 and 3, as a means of introducing classroom research, and as a precursor to VSRD, during their first three-week teaching practice the case study trainees were encouraged to set up a video camera and voice recorder to familiarise the children with its presence. They were asked to record a short teaching interaction with a small group during a literacy, or English lesson and to use a very basic analysis frame to enable them to judge: 1. Who did most of the talking, 2. Who asked most of the questions, 3. If anyone dominated the discussion. This technique was borrowed from Admiraal and Wubbels’ (2005) research ‘Multiple voices, multiple truths’, in which trainee teachers reflected on their practice, and engaged in e-mail correspondence with the researcher. In this case, the participants e-mailed after viewing the video and reflecting on their management of talk, using the simple analysis frame below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video yourself engaging in 10 or 15 minutes of small group discussion. After about a week, watch the video and ask yourself the following questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Did I dominate the discussion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did the children have an opportunity to ask questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Who spoke the most?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select about 5 minutes of the session &amp; make a simple grid to count the number of turns each participant had during that time, and how many words each person said (including yourself).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there anything that took you by surprise? How did you feel about the session when you watched it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 8: introduction to data analysis using video**

In the SPRinT project. Moyles et al (ibid) established conditions for private viewing of videoed teaching episodes prior to discussion. This, they believe, is both a valuable tool for developing cognitive and metacognitive awareness, and for professional development through evidence-informed reflective practice. The resulting e-mail correspondence indicated that although students could not prevent themselves from watching the video immediately after the lesson, leaving a week’s gap before re-watching and analysing altered their immediate perception that the sequence had been ‘bad teaching’, and showed that in fact, the children had been learning. At this stage, their answers focused more on the notion of learning than their management of talk. The trainees were not tracked in their second placement.
3.3.9 Research instruments: live lesson observations

Observation also sits within a naturalistic framework, and initially, VSRD observation was intended to ensure a greater contextualisation of the data, and to confirm students’ observations about the nature of the class, the school dynamic, and the attitudes and beliefs of the mentor/class teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Research instrument</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 3</td>
<td>a. Live lesson observation</td>
<td>b. e-mailed trainee reflection</td>
<td>5 PG trainees</td>
<td>Purposive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 9: Lesson observation schedule

Angrosino and Mays de Perez (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), accord observation the status of the fundamental basis of all research in the social sciences. In the final cycle, ‘live’ lesson observation was added to the data collection methods to give a clearer picture of the environment in which the teaching took place. This was partly due to the temperamental nature of the technology which, in Cycle 1 and 2, had made decoding dialogue difficult, but also to add an extra component to the case studies. This, it was felt, would give the reader a better understanding of ‘being there’. Although traditionally, the most common stance for the researcher to adopt in classroom observation is ‘observer as participant’, my role was that of a non-participant observer, undertaking what Flick (2009, p.223) refers to as “focused observations that concentrate on aspects that are relevant to the research question”. I followed Cresswell’s (2008) guidelines, obtaining the necessary permissions, identifying who to observe (the participant), length of time (20 minutes of small-group teaching), what to record (field notes to accompany video data) and how to be introduced (as an outsider). Limited notes were taken, focussing on the nature of the dialogue, control and ownership of questioning, use of probes, opportunities for children to question and chaining of responses. Any non-specified ‘significant’ events, or examples of dialogue were also recorded in the notes. Although the main problem facing a non-participant observer is often that of remaining on the edge without being drawn in (Flick, 2009), working with students meant that pupils were used to seeing visiting adults in the classroom, and not being expected to interact with them. In the event, I attempted
to position myself as unobtrusively as possible and avoided interaction to try to be ‘socially invisible’. It is not possible, however, to state with certainty that my presence did not cause a change in behaviour triggering a ‘halo’ effect (Denscombe, 2003). Similarly, I was unable to visit each site regularly enough to be taken for granted. A post-hoc inclusion to the design was the decision to ask the Cycle 3 participants to e-mail a written reflection after they had viewed the video of the observed lesson. This strategy was particularly helpful in helping them to begin the process of reflection before the VSRD session.

In total, 17 VSRD observations and 5 ‘live’ observations were carried out. Although the observations did not provide a convergent picture of the promotion of dialogic talk, the field notes proved an invaluable means of comparing trainees’ perceptions with those of the researcher. In each case my field notes were shared with the participants and were open to the class teacher, if so desired, after the students had given their own reflection on the teaching episode during the VSRD interview. This ‘member check’, discussed further below, was conducted to strengthen validity. It should also be noted at this point, that although the literature review indicated that the relationship with the mentor is a significant aspect in determining the students’ perception of success (or otherwise) in the practice classroom, it was not the intention of this project to include data from them. Where mention is made of the class teacher, or mentor, in the analyses, this is drawn from a significant comment made by the participant, or an observation from my field notes, to substantiate students’ comments.

3.3.10 Co-construction of interviews

The preceding sections of this chapter have endeavoured to indicate that I freely acknowledge my position as a social constructivist, and the influence this may have had on the project. What I hope has also been evident is that the research sought to position the participants as genuine partners engaged in the business of constructing understanding together. As such, the reflective interviews/discussions were directed to a large extent by the students; they were encouraged to select the areas for discussion, the episodes of teaching to deconstruct, and to be open about their perceived constraints
without fear of being judged against the QTS Standards. The collaborative re-reading of research papers on dialogic teaching, and the iterative process of shared dialogue, reflection, and re-interpretation of data between researcher and participants, as transcripts were studied and debated, helped to ensure a more even, dialogic relationship: this did not happen by chance. In a project which attempts to investigate dialogic practice, it is appropriate to ensure its principle of constantly remaking meaning in the light of what has gone before (Bakhtin, 1990) is embedded in the research process.

### 3.3.11 Alterations to the English course

Changes to the design of the English course have been alluded to above, particularly in the context of the data obtained through the Cycle 1 and 2 questionnaires. These alterations are presented below to illustrate the way in which the concept of dialogic talk was made explicit, rather than implicit, and embedded in university sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Alterations</th>
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| 1 (2007-08) | 1. A three hour session on oracy adapted to include material from the National Oracy Project, particularly examining social, communicative & cognitive aspects of talk.  
2. All English sessions amended to include specific input on higher order questions, and modeling of dialogic strategies: genuine questions; probing and chaining responses; handing control of questions to students. |
| 2 (2008-09) | Changes from previous year retained, plus:  
1. A lecture on dialogic talk included early in the academic year.  
2. Alexander’s dialogic principles shared with students;  
3. Dialogic talk explicitly modelled and deconstructed in the context of guided reading; students involved in deconstructing transcripts of talk from classroom observations;  
4. Links made with 2 foundation subject tutors; dialogic strategies are modelled, discussed and cross referenced between R.E., D T and English workshop sessions;  
5. Theoretical and briefing papers placed on the VLE for further reading. |
| 3 (2009-10) | Previous changes retained, plus:  
1. Students share talk histories in pair discussion during oracy session; this is linked to a wider discussion of the impact this might have on their own teaching;  
2. Students encouraged to identify and comment on aspects of dialogic talk during English sessions, and to consider the impact on learning. |

Fig. 10: Alterations to the English course
3.4. Validity

The previous sections, in particular 3.3.1, on the use of multiple data sets, allude to the concern that validity is a controversial issue in qualitative research. According to Norris (1997), many of the constructs of ‘validity’ pertain to experimental quantitative research design and sit uncomfortably within the qualitative paradigm, and Winter (2000) adds that this confusion is partly a result of the conflation of ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’. Maxwell (1992) offers a taxonomy of five types of validity which may be considered at different stages of the research process, although this is heavily critiqued by both Winter (2000) and Norris (1997) as rooted in the positivist notion of universal laws, reason and fact.

According to Maxwell, descriptive validity, the selection of data, and use of language to interpret what was experienced, poses the greatest threat to validity, since different methods, or different observers, may record different accounts of an event. The use of ‘member check’ (Doyle, 2007), however, involving the researcher and researched in working together to plan, collect the data, discuss interpretations, and check for accuracy and elaboration, was hoped to minimise the concerns expressed by Maxwell (ibid) and others. As Norris (1997) points out, however, researchers are fallible, they make errors and get things wrong, but no paradigm can eliminate this. Maxwell’s second category of interpretative validity appears distinguish between the business of describing and interpreting data. Denscombe (2003) similarly alludes to the problems of presenting transcript extracts out of context as a means of demonstrating ‘truth’ rather than as an illustration of a point, and Winter (2000) adds that individuals may not have ‘valid’ interpretations of their own actions. The latter point is of particular significance for this research: in asking trainees to reflect on, and deconstruct, their own practice, the inevitability that investigating classroom practice might produce conflicting and converging ‘truths’ must be acknowledged. The stimulated recall process, allowing participants to select places to stop the video for discussion, rather than being directed to do so by the researcher, however, attempted to address the issue of taking things out of context, and to strengthen reliability.
In category three, theoretical validity, Maxwell asserts that the constructs researchers apply to research, or develop during its collection, are critical. This should be contrasted with the notion that in qualitative research, the researcher’s theoretical framework shapes the approach to data collection. The fourth category of generalisability has been discussed previously in the context of ‘what works’ in research, and is returned to in 3.5.iii below, but it is well defined by Winter (2000) thus:

*It is likely that a ‘generalisable’ statement, whilst relating to all those to whom it is applied, may not actually describe the phenomena of any single case with accuracy, in the same way that a mean average score need not be the same value as any of the numbers of which it is an average. (p.6)*

The final category, evaluative validity is almost inescapable, providing that this is not construed as a conclusive statement at the end of the project. Norris (1997) suggests that the researcher should be open about their prejudices and assumptions. This may, to a certain extent, ensure that any claims are made modestly, and, with the understanding that knowledge can be revisited. As Lather (1993 p. 697) suggests, validity is “multiple, partial, endlessly deferred”.

The necessity of random sampling, essential for quantitative research, is not appropriate in qualitative research; what is common to both methods, however, is the question of how far the research is measuring what we wish it to measure. Qualitative research offers terms such as ‘trustworthiness’, plausible’ and ‘representative’ rather than ‘fact’; perhaps, as Winter (2000) suggests, we should also ask what kind of ‘truth’ we are measuring. Validity was addressed therefore, by ensuring that the questions were drawn from the literature, and from lessons learned from each cycle.

**3.4.1 Reliability**

According to Kirk and Miller (1986), there are three criteria which may be specified for determining reliability in qualitative research. The first of these, Quixotic reliability, is the attempt to determine how far the re-use of a method may lead to the same results; however, when researching in the field, they suggest that repeated statements are indicative of a created version of the event, rather than clues to what actually ‘was’. The
second, Diachronic reliability, or the stability of measurements across time, suggests that the phenomenon in question may not change over time; this is unlikely in any study of socially situated exchanges. The final criterion, Synchronic reliability, refers to the constancy of results obtained at the same time, but through the use of different instruments. This final category is suggested as the most profitable means of assuring reliability, since when this criterion is not fulfilled, the researcher then seeks to understand why that is the case. This, they believe, leads to a more careful analysis of the data.

The quality of recording data and documentation, particularly the use of field notes, are suggested by a number of sources (Flick, 2006; Kirk and Miller, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Silverman, 1993) to be a valuable means of ensuring reliability. The adoption of writing conventions, for example, allows the reader to see what is a statement made by the interviewee, and what an interpretation made by the researcher. The more carefully the whole research process is documented, therefore, the more the evident reliability of the process although Lincoln and Guba prefer to use the term ‘dependability’.

A positivist would undoubtedly argue that this project is not reliable as it is not completely replicable, and the ‘measuring instrument’ cannot be claimed to be precise. Silverman (2003) argues that in interpretive research this may be ameliorated by close attention to the interview schedule; however, in a semi-structured interview there can be no guarantee that identical questions will be asked, or that they will be posed in the same order. Hammersley (1992) suggests that assigning instances to the same categories on different occasions can aid reliability, and this is sometimes attempted through undertaking content analysis, counting the number of instances of a certain group of words in text. This proved, to a certain extent, a useful strategy in coding the data, although utterances were more often coded by theme than by word groups. In ensuring multiple viewings of video material by both researcher and participants, and recording and coding all the data, it is hoped that the data were not misrepresented. This project, then, makes no substantial claims for reliability – it does, however, attempt to paint as truthful a picture as possible of the real life experiences of 9 primary postgraduate trainee teachers’ attempts to engage with dialogue in the classroom.
3.4.2 Generalisability

This section concludes by examining the concept of generalisability. A considerable amount of words (for example, Biesta, 2005; Bauman, 1992; Hammersley, 2005) have been devoted to the ‘professionalisation’ of teaching and the push to make it an evidence-based profession in the ‘what works’ tradition of medicine. We currently work in a climate which sees stronger political control of education than ever before; as Pring (2001) and Fendler (2006) caution, in the current climate of school effectiveness, research may be misunderstood by politicians seeking any scrap of evidence to support policy. Biesta, however, posits that education is a process of “symbolically mediated interaction” (p. 6), and that it is only possible to make sense of education through the mutual interpretation of individuals struggling to make sense of what they are being taught. As Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, p 567) urge, we should question if research is “only about efficiency with basic values unquestioned”.

In qualitative research, however, the researcher looks for meaning in the experiences of localised culture, rather than finding measurable categories which may be applied to other situations. It is hoped that this study is interesting in the understanding it offers; the breadth and depth of the investigation conducted; the deep exploration of data, and its particularity. The iterative process of coding and exploring multiple data sets set out to present a picture of a range of trainees over three years as they attempted to grapple with the multiple demands of a postgraduate course whilst engaging in collaborative research. It does not offer a set of rules for effective action in a range universities and schools, but offers the reader an insight into what it means to be a primary trainee, grappling with potentially conflicting values, beliefs and demands.
3.4.3 Limitations of the study

The study has many limitations. Firstly, although a number of case studies were undertaken, it cannot be claimed that the participants were ‘typical’ of a set of postgraduate ITT students, if such a thing were possible. It can only be argued that these were selected to represent a diverse range of opinion on the use of talk. Secondly, the number of changes, which were made to the research design, indicates the difficult of eliciting information about phenomena without leading, or prompting, respondents. It may also be argued, however, that the changes were a strength as, with each cycle, particular attention was paid to the way in which the instruments needed to be ‘fine-tuned’ and expanded to capture a more particular and informed picture of espoused and enacted beliefs and pedagogy.

A further limitation was that of time. In a very full postgraduate year, it was difficult for participants and the researcher to find sufficient time for reflection, observation and discussion. As indicated, this meant that one of the initial research sub questions – how far were trainees able to improve their promotion of dialogic talk – had to be abandoned because there was no opportunity to conduct VSRD half way through TP, and then complete a second observation and interview at the end of the course. Similarly, it had not been anticipated that when each cohort returned to university, focused solely on finding a job, they would be subjected to a number of questionnaires from a variety of sources. This resulted in non-completion or scant information being recorded meaning it was not possible to gain a broad picture of the nature of shifts in epistemology.

Although it was initially planned to involve a total of 14 case study students, it had been anticipated that some might withdraw from the project, and this proved to be the case. The difficulty of working with the data in Cycle 1 reduced the number from three to one, and in Cycle 2, one of the MFL trainees experienced difficulty in completing the VSRD in her final placement. In the final cycle the reduction from 8 to 5 participants, due to a range of factors, meant that there was not as broad a range of views as had originally been represented. Case study material was, therefore, only obtained from 9 students.
Clearly it needs to be questioned exactly how far the participants regarded themselves as co-partners in the research. Although the initial 12 and remaining 9 all expressed eagerness to become involved, and agreed that they were equally researching their own practice, in reality, with the exception possibly of Simon in Cycle 2, and Dave in Cycle 3 (not their real names), all were seeking guidance and affirmation from me.

Although these limitations are freely and openly acknowledged, in themselves they gave rise to a number of potentially fruitful avenues of further enquiry. For example, if the luxury of a break for reflection could be built into the pattern of postgraduate TP, it might be possible to follow the issue of how far trainees are able to improve practice. Several of the students chose to write their Masters assignments on the use of dialogic talk; it might, therefore, be profitable to rearrange the course structure to encourage the formation of tutor/trainee research groups, or ‘clusters’ to work together during the writing process.

Grant (2007) reminds us that the process of action research is not smooth, and that in working at multiple levels, we need to value the richness and variety of our experiences, and not regard deviations from the planned tidy cycles as failures. To return to the number of changes made to the cycles, I took note of Greenwood and Levin’s (2005) account of a successful, and unusual, collaborative action research project at Cornell University. Here, a doctoral researcher worked in collaboration with students to revise a difficult course in order to make it better fitted for purpose, that is, both tailored to the students’ learning needs, and to the requirement of the employment market. Greenwood and Levin (2005) see this demanding, yet satisfying, process as a means of ensuring research addresses an issue at the heart of student needs:

*The research foci will not emerge from reading the latest fashionable theory within an academic profession, but rather a negotiated joint understanding of what the problem in focus should be...for academic researchers, this places a premium on the ability and willingness to frame researchable questions in concrete problem situations. (p. 60)*

Although this research is not directly concerned with the needs of the employment market, it is ultimately concerned with learning. Learning through talk is an issue which, as the literature review showed, has been a subject of concerned debate for the last 35
years, and one with which student teachers and university courses need to engage if teachers entering the profession are to transcend a recitation script.
Chapter 4: Dialogic approaches in the classroom: Cycle 1 data analysis

It is sometimes suggested that researchers are not reflexive enough in their interpretation of the data, claiming that they speak for themselves, and assuming that their ‘neutrality’ allows this to happen. Acknowledgement of the messy business of struggling with interview data is, however, becoming more common, and both Van Maanen (1988) and Silverman (1997) urge the researcher to pay attention to small details rather than make grandiose claims about reality. It is hoped that the data analysis is reflexive, and does pay attention to small details, and makes full acknowledgement of the ‘messy’ and unexpected problems in both collecting, and interpreting them.

4.1 Research objectives

This research examined the thesis that there are a number of factors which impact upon student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk in the primary classroom. It further speculated that through collaborative review and reflection on practice with a sophisticated partner, and in the light of video evidence, students might articulate their conceptualisation of dialogic teaching and refine their practice of it. By offering stories and case study information about their views, and examples of practice, it is hoped to enable the reader to get closer to the participants in this project, and to reflect some of their struggle as they attempted to embed this innovation into their practice. Section 3.2 detailed these objectives, suggesting that it might be possible to construct a typology of dialogic talk through the participants’ articulation of their understanding. Section 3.4 of the methodology chapter details the research instruments and changes which evolved over the 3 cycles. This chapter provides an overview of the data collected in Cycle 1, conclusions drawn at that stage and a reflection and review of the research process.

As detailed in Chapter 3 section 3.4.1, Cycle 1 commenced in March 2008 with the issue of the questionnaire and the associated problem of clustered responses. A number of statements designed to probe attitudes towards key issues such as collaborative talk, the role talk plays in developing learning and the role of the teacher in promoting talk,
appeared to prove problematic. Over half of the respondents indicated a neutral stance to the statement suggesting that children waste time by chatting socially during group-work. 11 were neutral about the possibility of increasing on-task behaviour if children were allowed to pose their own questions, and a surprising 18 were neutral when asked to consider if checking up on knowledge was the teacher’s main role when working with a group. Conversely, 21 of 25 respondents disagreed with the statement that there was no time to allow children to think of their own questions, with the remaining 4 adopting a neutral position. Several respondents annotated their answers, and even added extra columns headed ‘it depends!’ An initial analysis of the data might have suggested that, disappointingly, even at the end of the taught course, trainees in the sample were ambivalent about talk for learning. Discussion with the group later indicated otherwise. Some revealed that they had not understood the questions; several believed that they had misread the headings and sometimes ticked ‘agree’ when they intended to disagree and two students explained that they made it a principle to always tick the neutral column throughout any questionnaire. It appeared, therefore that any further analysis would have been fundamentally flawed.

As previously acknowledged, in the first cycle of the project, only one member of the group, rather than three, was approached and invited to collaborate as a research partner. Tom (not his real name) had demonstrated, both through engagement in taught sessions, and the topic he selected for a Masters level assignment, an openness to the use of dialogue, and a wish to improve his practice. He was eager to take part, explaining that he saw the partnership as ‘a mutual process of discovery and improvement’ and an opportunity to do a number of things. These included being able to look in more detail at an area of pedagogy which captured his interest – oracy, and to be able to experiment with the use of video as a means of reflecting on, and analysing, his practice. Finally he was able to take the opportunity to discuss in more depth than university sessions permitted, philosophical and pedagogical issues related to the promotion of talk for learning. As a researcher, I saw this as a chance to better understand the dilemmas facing student teachers as they attempt to link theory to practice. We both agreed that our relationship would not be that of teaching practice tutor and student, and that we would attempt, as far as possible, to view ourselves as co-explorers.
Although this clearly did not provide a range of case study material I had planned, it still generated rich data in the snapshots of classroom dialogue captured, and the wealth of interview/reflection material. Prior to Tom’s final practice we re-read key articles by Skidmore (2003) and Alexander (2001) and engaged in further discussion about dialogic teaching.
4.2. Cycle 1: Case Study 1: Tom

Pen portrait

Tom was in his mid thirties and had a degree in Photography and Graphic Design. He had no classroom experience prior to commencing the PGCE course.

Semi-structured interview

Following his agreement to participate, I conducted a semi-structured interview with Tom, using probes from the original questionnaire. Elaborating on his views about talk, he explained that he saw it as 'a means of learning...expressing who we are and asking what we want to know and understand'. He was strongly of the opinion that, if the work was interesting, and if children were encouraged to 'collaboratively problem-solve', discussion would move learning forward without the need for the teacher to 'control' it. Tom stated that he had developed this view because his own degree in photography was centered on 'taking responsibility for your own learning, and talking ideas through'. As a new father, he also felt that regardless of how young children were, it was 'possible to encourage communication and listen to what children have to say. Time shouldn’t be a factor'. Although he had little classroom experience, Tom was clear that being an effective teacher was not about allocating ‘fair turns for everyone to speak’, but trying to set up conditions ‘where children can speak to each other and understand that the teacher doesn’t have to ask all the questions and give all the answers’. He acknowledged that class control was challenging, but thought that it was ‘sometimes easier to manage a class than a small group as regards discussion’. Tom raised the concept of dialogic talk himself, commenting that it appeared to be ‘a more fundamentally democratic way of conducting things’. He explained that by this, he meant that he felt teachers spent too long ‘talking at’ children, concluding by adding that he found the ‘whole thing of unexpected questions and directions children can take’ very exciting.

The interview indicated that Tom was, indeed, very well disposed to the idea of using talk. He only referred once to its place in developing learning, but returned several times to the idea of collaborative problem-solving through talk; this appeared to be related directly to his own experience of university.
Contextual information

Tom undertook his final teaching practice in a very small seaside primary school. The university course design meant that as he had completed his initial placement there, he was familiar with the children, the school and routines. All Key Stage 2 pupils were taught within his class and Tom frequently team-taught with an experienced female teacher; she taking the year 5 and 6 children and he, year 3 and 4. Having obtained the necessary consents, Tom set up a video camera in his classroom, switching it on at random times, to acclimatise the children to its presence. He aimed to capture a 20 minute segment of group talk, and to complete VSRD with me.

4.2.1 VSRD

Just over half way through his final practice during the summer term, Tom brought a video extract of an episode of group teaching for reflective discussion. Before any critical reflection took place, however, he contextualised the teaching and learning, providing a background to the viewing. This featured a literacy lesson where Tom worked with the most able group of Year 4 pupils. The lesson was one of a series and showed the early stages of developing narrative writing based in an imaginary world. Having been introduced to a text by Tolkien, the children were analysing it to try to understand how the author leads the reader into a magical world through use of language and (to quote Tom) “the fascinating thing, the things he doesn’t tell us”. His main lesson objective was to teach the children to use talk to share ideas. It is important to state at this point that technical difficulties impaired the clarity of the recorded dialogue; this meant that there was little alternative to accepting Tom’s interpretation of events and to drawing some conclusions from the body language and expression of the children. This was clearly a limitation, and as such is explored in section 4.3.2 below.

4.2.2 Tom’s conceptual understanding of dialogic talk

Probing Tom’s conceptual understanding of dialogic talking in the semi-structured interview during the VSRD meeting showed that he believed it to be closely allied to collaborative learning. Talk in groups, according to Tom, should be ‘collaborative and respectful… not just about a single child controlling the situation and only getting their
point of view across’. This respect for others’ views was seen as essentially egalitarian and democratic in nature, and developed through ‘a conversation that everyone participates in and shares, shares, what they’re thinking about the subject the teacher has asked them to talk about.’ He went on, however, to qualify this by indicating that dialogic talk did not necessarily hinge upon the teacher’s ideas; it could be child-initiated with ‘the direction…driven by what they want to say and talk about.’ That, he stated could ‘lead them off on a different path’ of exploration.’

Beyond the opportunity to participate in a co-operative enterprise, Tom also indicated that this was an ideal situation in which to give children ‘permission’ to change their mind. In order to do this, they had to be able to ‘decentre’ their ideas. He believed this would take place in a ‘shared environment’ where children would discuss views, concepts, understandings, possibly ‘coming to different opinions about, maybe, what they think’. They would develop greater autonomy as they explored their own views, and those of others, ‘maybe changing their overall outcome from the position where they were initially’.

The discussion showed that his conceptions had seemingly remained unaltered during teaching practice, with collaboration and democratic values perceived as central.

4.2.3 Tom’s understanding of the pedagogical purpose of dialogic talk

Tom believed that talk was a tool for cognitive development, although he thought that it might be perceived as ‘safer for teachers to focus on producing things’, adding that talk per se was undervalued. This was a previously unexpressed view, and, in the light of the video extract, may relate to the teaching style of his class teacher. In articulating its pedagogical purpose, for the first time he moved beyond naming ‘collaborative problem-solving’, to specifically link learning, speaking, listening and reconceptualising, expressing it thus:

Dialogic talk is the key [to learning] because it’s about them being able to, without feeling a threat, voice their opinions, talk to each other, listen to each other, respond and re-gather all those thoughts, and, like I said at the beginning, maybe to go off in a different direction to where they began.
4.2.4 Tom’s critique of his promotion of dialogic talk

From the Reflective Framework, Tom decided to focus on Self-Awareness, Perceptual Awareness and Dialogic Reflection. He drew attention to the fact during the session, he was crouching at head height with the children, listening to them. He went on to reflect that on watching, it was very apparent that although the children were keen to discuss, they were directing all their comments to him ‘looking for my praise, or my displeasure, or my direction’. His aim was to move the discussion forward, but ‘to withdraw myself so they then talked to each other.’

Explaining that the crouching position was important for him, he elaborated ‘So I’m as low as the children, trying to make them feel comfortable that I’m not leading this because it’s not about me’. He contrasted this with his partner teacher’s body position (standing above the children) and the way the children reacted to that: ‘hands go up’. Indeed, over the entire interaction, another teacher’s voice could be heard talking loudly, without pausing, to the rest of the groups, posing closed questions and giving instructions. Tom stated that although the children were still ‘trying to engage’ him, he used body language again to indicate that he wanted the response to be ‘open to the table, someone else to step in’.

Tom moved on to discuss his dialogic reflection; in particular the hidden assumptions that can influence the way we teach and the power relationships within that.

I think that the way we perceive ourselves as a teacher, arguably, certainly gives us...a power, and a feeling of authority. And maybe you get...carried away by that thought in a way you deliver your practice.

Tom believed children have skills and knowledge of their own; that he could learn from them, and that teaching for him was not about telling them ‘this is what you should be thinking’. He said that dialogic talk had become a trademark ‘Tom way of doing, or trying to do’ things, adding ‘I think it’s recognised that I have a belief that children talking to each other are fundamentally learning, sharing their ideas and talking from peer to peer’.

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4.2.5 Tom’s concerns about promoting dialogic talk

The interview also explored any concerns or constraints he felt in using dialogic talk in his practice, and attempted to gain some insight into the experiences or attitudes which might impact on his ability to promote it. The aim was to place him, as accurately as possible, on the ‘Characteristics of Concern’ matrix. His concerns fell into 2 main categories:

- Noise levels
- Contrast with his mentor’s teaching style

Tom initially displayed no apparent anxiety or uncertainty about using dialogic talk, stating ‘it’s such a strong element in what we should be doing’. He referred to himself as ‘a big champion’ of dialogue with ‘no concern whatsoever’ in promoting it. His overall view was summed up as follows:

We should be trying to encourage the children to develop, as opposed to leading from the front and then [the children] writing in the books with very little communication between them.

However, he went on to add that ‘noise levels are quite a big issue, possibly, arguably, my class make a bit too much noise’. This was an issue when planning for a shared classroom. Because his class teacher taught in ‘a very structured way’ with ‘delivery…very much from the front, question and answer’, he was not sure if she ‘believes in’ his approach, or felt that he should be demonstrating more control. Almost as an aside, Tom twice stated that he was not sure if he was managing dialogic talk correctly.

The final 6 questions were designed to ascertain Tom’s level of use of dialogic talk. He made it clear that he did not consider himself expert in its promotion and management, but was aware of theoretical perspectives, citing work by Alexander (2001) and Myhill (2006), and research on its use in science, as influential. He had taken steps, independently, to find out more about it and did not feel that this means of structuring the construction of knowledge was particularly suited to one curricular area alone.
4.2.6 What Tom learned from the process of VSRD

Tom explained that it was reassuring to notice small, but important things on the video, for example, one of the boys in the discussion group was very bright, but ‘very disruptive’. In his first practice, Tom had ‘struggled to keep him on his seat’, but he noticed now that he was ‘on task, very much engaged… trying to engage the others in what they’re learning’. He found that a good feeling. Another interesting point he noticed was that when he left the table, the children continued to talk, ‘there’s still discussion. One key difference is that they’re talking to each other instead of asking questions of me’. Perhaps the most significant thing, he commented, was noticing the partner teacher’s style which lead to such very different reactions from the children. Looking at the two different approaches, he said, was ‘really, really interesting’. Tom was eager to continue to discuss the research process, and to reiterate his beliefs about talk.

My previous experience as a teacher educator had indicated that students do not view speaking and listening as part of the English remit, despite its weight as an attainment target in the National Curriculum (DfEE, 1999) for the last twenty years. Tom was old enough to have been taught from the National Curriculum, but not to have experienced the National Literacy Strategy. This may have been the reason that his only references to talk for learning related to his experience at degree level, and to discussion with his baby daughter, not to his own experience at school. He made frequent reference to children being encouraged to have a voice, but none to what the teacher’s role might be. Tom was vocal about the aspect of dialogic talk Alexander (2001) deems cumulative, which has some commonality with Mercer’s exploratory talk (2000), where children engage in ‘interthinking’ and talk themselves to meaning. Reciprocal aspects, however, were not mentioned, neither was the place of probing questions: the teacher did not appear to have a voice or a role in classroom discussion.

Tom’s conception of a dialogic exchange seemed, therefore, the opposite of the ‘interactive teaching’ promoted by the PNS (2006) and criticised heavily by research (Myhill, 2006; Mroz et al, 2001; English et al, 2001); it was more about what the teacher should not do (dominate, direct, lead, question), than what they should do. In this
democratic exchange of ideas between peers, it was not clear how the teacher would help children to move learning forward.

4.3 Learning lessons from Cycle 1:

4.3.1 Technical difficulties

This section offers an insight into collaborative action research in process, and shows the way in which unexpected events and difficulties were tackled. Although methodological changes are detailed in Chapter 3, this attempts to present a more particular picture of the reasons for those changes, informed by mutual reflection of the researcher and participant. Beyond the methodological difficulties associated with the initial questionnaire, detailed in 3.3.1 and 4.2.1 above, there were a number of technical difficulties. The initial semi-structured interview and episode of VSRD provided an interesting picture of Tom’s high levels of conceptual understanding and epistemic development, particularly the extent to which he felt able to exist in what Hofer (2001) terms “an uncomfortableness of uncertainty”. However, although it was possible to gain a clear picture, via the video, of Tom’s body language and gestures, and those of the children, what it was not possible to do was evaluate the precise nature of the dialogue. Although he was able to interpret and comment upon paralinguistic features and provide access to the ‘hidden’ aspects of non-verbal discourse which might not otherwise be apparent, technical difficulties with the data recorder, and the dominant voice of the experienced teacher, meant that no clear examples of talk were captured. This was disappointing, yet it possibly provided greater opportunities for discussion about his deeply held views and beliefs about learning. Despite this, clearly it was not possible to evaluate the quality, or frequency of the talk, nor how far his espoused practice was enacted.

What was also clear was that Tom was not familiar enough with the reflective framework to venture much beyond discussing self-awareness, although with some prompting he did touch on two other categories. As the research partner, I was also rather tentative about my role during the VSRD. We discussed the fact that I was not coaching, nor making a judgment for the award of QTS, yet there was a level of uncertainty about how far I
should respond to statements in the spirit of improving practice. Ultimately, I reached the
decision not to offer advice, since the process of reflective dialogue was to encourage
Tom to improve his own practice through critical reflection.

It was clear that several changes would need to be made for the process of VSRD in
Cycle 2, not least that the participants would need to be fairly familiar with the reflective
framework for discussion. I would also have to be clearer about my own role, and a more
reliable method of capturing talk (notoriously difficult to accomplish) would have to be
devised. The taught English course was also altered to offer a more explicit and reflexive
model of dialogic talk.

I made the decision at this point to start the second cycle earlier in the academic year,
aware that there would a significant elapse of time between the initial interview, and the
VSRD on final teaching practice. This resulted in another significant change in Cycle 2:
the introduction of participants to the process of VSRD in their first placement in the
Autumn Term. Tom had suggested that it would have been helpful for him to have
maintained weekly contact with me via e-mail; mindful of this, I also established
conditions for weekly e-mail contact with the participants.

4.3.2 Emerging themes

It was not possible to claim any significant corroboration, or dissonances, with the
literature from analysis of data provided by one respondent. The VSRD, however, had
provided a powerful opportunity to address any apparent contradictions between data
drawn from interviews and observations by considering them together. It permitted the
development of shared understandings, particularly since Tom was able to control the
focus of attention, and the pace of inquiry. It enabled him to exemplify his beliefs about
practice in the context of the lesson; to mediate experience through articulation of
intention, and to interpret the context and content of the lesson in a way not immediately
apparent to the researcher. The resulting rich and broad dialogue allowed identification of
a number of emergent themes.
As indicated above, despite being more widely read in dialogic talk than his peers, and his stated confidence in promoting it, Tom did not have a complete grasp of Alexander’s 5 principles (2008) of dialogic teaching, nor of Skidmore’s ideas about teacher and pupils as ‘co-learners’, or other ‘indicators’ of dialogic talk, including chaining and probing responses. Although these dialogic approaches had been contextualised in university sessions, and related academic reading had been read and discussed with Tom, he had only retained, and put into practice, aspects related to promoting collaborative discussion. As explored in Chapter 2, the fact that he had not drawn more from his reading and discussion, despite being positively inclined towards its promotion, may indicate why innovations in practice sometimes simply become labels.

Secondly, no reference was made to the limitations of a poorly managed IRF format, or the importance of using children’s answers as the fulcrum of the learning exchange. Although Tom stressed the importance of children raising questions, and saw teaching from the front as ‘a bad thing’, presumably related to his reading on interactive teaching, he did not suggest how teaching might be managed, or that there was sometimes a case for instructing. Not all talk should be dialogic talk. As restrictive IRF exchanges are said to be typical of discourse in the UK and North America (Mehan, 1979; Dillon, 1974; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Hardman & Williamson, 1998), it seems significant that Tom did not refer to this as something a good practitioner needed to be aware of.

Thirdly, I had not been able to ascertain if Tom had begun his PGCE course with these particular ideas about the democratic and problem-solving nature of collaborative discussion. Although as indicated, he had cited his experience during his first degree course, his ideas might have been developed even further back and remained intact during his initial teacher training. Much literature examined in Chapter 2 (for example, Smith, 2005; Hayes, 2000) discusses the powerful influence of mediating cognitive factors such as beliefs, theories and attitudes in the construction of teacher identity.

Fourthly, although he was clear that the teacher’s role was not about allocating ‘fair turns to speak’, he did refer several times to being ‘more democratic’, and the danger of using
one’s power. This might indicate that, as Alexander (2001) indicates, classroom dialogue in England is still more concerned with social aspects than cognitive.

Finally, Tom made several comments about not being sure if his class teacher valued what he did; to the difference in their teaching styles, and to the ‘problem’ of noise levels. In a two-class school, the preceding factors are significant. This is, again, related to the development of teacher identity. As posited by many (Coleman, 1998; Hayes, 2000, Maynard, 2000) the mentor has a pivotal place in allowing the trainee to develop as ‘teacher as learner’ in a reciprocal arrangement of trust. Even such a seemingly confident student appeared to be seeking positive reinforcement.

At the end of Cycle 1, the methodological and technical changes detailed in 3.3 were finalised. I was aware that in working in such a complex environment as the classroom, and with a greater number of participants, a different set of complications might well arise. I was also conscious that the themes I had tentatively identified in my first case study might well not be replicated.
Chapter 5: Dialogic talk in 3 classrooms: data analysis  
Cycle 2

This chapter builds upon the lessons learned from Cycle 1, and presents a picture of the process of data collection, and an analysis of the information obtained from the participants in the second cycle. It goes on to take the reader into the classrooms of the research participants and illuminate their struggle to develop a teaching identity, and manage the demands of dialogic talk. The concluding section presents an analysis of the exit data from the convenience sample, and ends with a reflection on the lessons learned from Cycle 2.

5.1 Whole cohort open response questionnaire

Although the changes detailed in Chapter 3 had been incorporated into the research design, at the start of Cycle 2 it was necessary to amend it even further. Timetable constraints determined the only opportunity to collect data on the initial thoughts, beliefs and values of the students before teaching began, was at the start of a whole cohort lecture in induction week. The revised open questionnaire was therefore issued to all 65 postgraduate students. This probed their memory of enjoyable aspects of English at school; their views of the role of talk in the classroom, and how they felt about ‘quiet’. It also attempted to elicit their conceptualisation of the role of the teacher in managing talk.

Before looking in more detail at the sample size identified in the research design (1 group of 25 students), it was interesting to note responses from the entire cohort to Question 9: How important do you feel it is for the teacher to impart their knowledge to children? This showed that approximately three quarters of the students believed that imparting knowledge was not only important, but, in several instances, “what the job is about”.

This pre-existing belief was then cross-referenced to prior employment in the classroom, to establish how many might have come to this conclusion through spending a significant block of time in school. It was evident that of the 44 students who were strongly in favour of imparting knowledge, roughly half had had prior paid employment in the classroom. What it was not possible to ascertain was how many of the rest had had voluntary
experience, or were basing their answer on the two-week pre-course placement. It was therefore evident that in Cycle 3, the questionnaire would have to be amended to ascertain more clearly the nature of prior classroom experience, if this was to be followed up. What was clear, however, was that a significant number of students had begun the course with the belief that the ‘talk’ role of the teacher was principally to impart knowledge to children.

5.2 The convenience sample

A convenience sample of 23 students (Group C) was then selected, and their responses analysed in more detail to enable the identification of 3 students with as differing views of classroom talk as possible. The following table provides an overview of the spread of age, gender and broad beliefs of the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mention of talk at own primary school</th>
<th>Aspects of English enjoyed in own childhood education</th>
<th>Attitude to Imparting knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
<td>None-negative Brief list Expanded positive comments</td>
<td>Imparters Guiders Discovery &amp; other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24- 25+</td>
<td>0 23</td>
<td>1 10 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 11: Overview of Group C

Somewhat to my surprise, none of the 23 respondents made any mention of talk in any of its guises when asked to discuss aspects of English they had enjoyed at primary school. Reading, poetry, writing stories and spelling were listed, and one mention of ‘finding answers in literature’, but no reference was made to discussion, debate, role play or story telling, for example. Although the sample represented a range of gender, age and prior experience all were positive about the use of talk in the classroom. There was an evident distinction between statements relating to the pedagogical purpose of talk, for example, its role in promoting understanding and developing listening and communication skills; and the role of the teacher in managing/directing it, for example, questioning, controlling noise and assessing understanding. What also emerged was the diversity of views about the nature of knowledge as a transferrable commodity. The range of codes arising from
the data is presented here to give an overview of the themes, which were grouped together into overarching categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>No. of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place of talk in English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to talk</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reference to talk</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk as a life skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skill</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadening the mind</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid expressing opinions</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to the ’world of work’</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A ’right’</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting self-expression</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical beliefs about talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of peer talk</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of teacher talk</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative working</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeing from constraints of writing</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for promoting talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about the role of the teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving everyone/Promoting equality</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding and managing</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing through talk</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing noise</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiding thought</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping talk “going”</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a role model</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring clear communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards ‘noise’ in lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet classroom promotes learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet classroom does not necessarily promote learning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet classroom does not promote learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imparting &amp; developing knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as ‘fount of knowledge’</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as learning partner</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as facilitator of discovery</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about using talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring task-related</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise/behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling’ contributions</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 12: Categories and themes from the data

Several respondents mentioned the role of talk in developing the ability to express an opinion, to broaden the mind and to hold one’s own as an adult. These were grouped together as the first concept, ‘life skills’, as they were unrelated to learning, and entirely about social confidence.
5.2.1 Pedagogical beliefs about talk

Many wrote about the purposes of classroom talk, and its link with learning or the ability to ‘get on with work’; these were categorised as Pedagogical Beliefs. Grouped together within this concept as ‘Importance of peer talk’ were several enthusiastic justifications for children to engage in discussion with each other in order to do one of three things: firstly, to transfer ideas, beliefs and concepts; secondly, to discuss the nature or requirement of the task; thirdly, to develop understanding. The ‘transfer’ concept was represented by statements such as ‘transferral of information, concepts, ideas and beliefs is vital in the learning process and talking to each other is the best method to ensure this happens’.

Discussing work was generally seen as a means of ensuring task comprehension, for example ‘Children need the chance to discuss their work with each other & help each other understand what to do’. This was as distinct from developing understanding, which was generally related to concept formation, for example, ‘some children find chatting their ideas through with their peers essential in helping them to develop their own understanding’.

Some wrote about discussion per se, linking this closely with learning in its capacity to ensure ‘embedding understanding’; and ‘increasing learning potential’, although one added a proviso that it was ‘not always appropriate’, and another, a cautious statement that ‘discussion is sometimes beneficial, providing it is related to the topic’. The use of questioning as a strategy, however, generally related to the teacher dealing with misconceptions, or the children seeking clarification, rather than as a means of extending and challenging thinking, or developing critical comprehension. Similarly, there were several comments about communication per se; these were separated from the notion of discussing work as they focused more specifically on the process of ‘building up skills’ and ‘communicating ideas’ rather than as a means of developing cognition.

Collaborative working was seen as a particular pedagogical approach, although what this might comprise was not elaborated upon. Similarly, the final code ‘Writing’, related to a statement that it could be used to ‘express opinions without the barriers that hold you back like problems with writing’. Although linked clearly with learning, it was the only reference to the possibility of using talk to address a specific ‘difficulty’.
5.2.2 Beliefs about the role of the teacher

The third category grouped statements about the ‘talk-role’ of the teacher, based mostly on the question related to ‘management’: this had been included to encourage some discussion of what might be meant by ‘managed. Over two thirds of the group interpreted this to mean controlling ‘relevance’ and ‘noise levels’. Responses focused on guiding discussion to ensure all participated, listened when appropriate, took turns, and discussed the subject in hand. However, overwhelmingly, almost all the group specified that the teacher’s main role when working with a group was to act as a form of referee of turn taking in a democratically ideal way; to ensure that all had a fair chance to speak, and to encourage the quieter to find a voice whilst ‘supressing’ the more eager talkers. This was generally written as, ‘to ensure everyone has a turn to express their opinion’, or ‘Making sure everyone gets to put their point across’, also expressed as ‘maximum inclusion’. There was no mention of a chain of discussion between pupils; it appeared to relate to the teacher receiving, and evaluating, individual responses. Only one reply mentioned developing learning, although much was also made of the need to allow space for children to express their own views and explore ideas, despite references to children using talk to request clarification and assistance, rather than as a metacognitive tool. ‘Asking questions if they do not understand and getting the children to repeat it back to you is important’, stated one respondent.

Many included provisos regarding the need for talk to be ‘controlled’, ‘structured’ and ‘managed’, with no less than 15 references made to the teacher’s place as a manager of relevance and focus. One in particular encapsulates the flavour of the answers:

[The teacher’s role is] ‘to structure the talk so children are able to stay on the topic and within the boundaries of what is being discussed. When children stray off the topic, the teacher’s role is to notice and manage it.’

Teacher talk needed to be ‘clear’ in order to support activities and appropriately structured to keep discussion going in case it became ‘stagnant’.
5.2.3 Attitude towards noise in lessons

Thoughts about the ‘quiet classroom’ were grouped under the concept of ‘attitude to noise’. In general, all were well disposed to the idea of discussion as a means of clarifying understanding, and talking ideas through, and the resultant noise levels (as long as these were ‘reasonable’). A quiet room was thought necessary for written tests, and to enable children to focus on tasks, with a third of the group regarding silence as an indicator that ‘children are learning by concentrating’ and that ‘everyone is on task and engrossed in their work’. Emphasis was placed on the notion of teacher-control of both volume and task-related content. A further third stated that ‘discussing’, ‘talking’, ‘debating’ and ‘sharing ideas’ were essential for learning and that a ‘quiet classroom could equal switched-off children’. 2 participants, however, had placed a pragmatic interpretation on the question, assuming it related to the use of music, commenting ‘Sometimes background music is appropriate to help relax/invigorate’ and part of ‘an appropriate mix’ in the classroom.

5.2.4 Imparting & developing knowledge

In the final question, the word ‘impart’ had been deliberately selected rather than a differently ontologically loaded choice such as ‘share’, and responses to this were grouped under the category ‘Imparting and developing knowledge’. Although this has been touched upon in 5.1 above, the most significant, and unexpected, findings related to an apparent contradiction between the number of students who felt that imparting knowledge was vital, or ‘extremely important’ with the teacher as the ‘fount of knowledge’ (9 students) and those same students’ espoused view that all members of the class should feel free and confident to express their own opinions. In the light of the findings from the whole cohort, the number of ‘imparters’ and ‘guiders’ were compared with previous paid classroom experience. This did not provide any significant results, since numbers were almost evenly divided between the ‘imparters’ (9) and ‘guiders’ (12) with 3 of each number having had prior paid classroom experience.
5.2.5 Concerns about using talk

The questionnaire had not been designed to probe the students’ possible reservations and concerns about promoting talk in their classrooms. Half the sample, however, made some reference, explicit or implicit, to the difficulties they might face in using this as a pedagogic strategy. This were grouped, firstly, into statements about problems in ensuring it was task-focussed, and did not ‘stray’ from the subject in hand. Without the teacher strictly policing this, it was feared that children might simply ‘chat’, or ‘go off on a tangent’. Secondly into those concerned with unacceptable levels of noise, or uncontrollable behaviour. Noise levels were seen as a factor, regardless of whether the discussion was on, or off, task. Clearly, it was felt that some schools might view children talking loudly as being ‘out of control’, regardless of the quality of talk. There also seemed to be a perception that ‘if you let children chat’, it might be difficult to ‘get them back’ under your control. No evidence was offered in support of these perceptions, so it is unclear if they relate to pre-existing beliefs.

5.3 Critical reflection on the questionnaire data

Analysis of the questionnaire data indicated that although the trainees were well disposed towards talk, and could relate this, in general terms, to ‘learning’, many were already wedded to the notion of teacher-as-imparter of knowledge. The number of comments relating to ‘controlling’, ‘shaping’ and ‘checking up’ indicated that, as the literature suggested, several were clear about who should have charge of the talk, what should be talked about, and the importance of ensuring everyone had a turn to speak, presumably with an evaluative comment interspersing these turns. The notion of teacher as a referee of talk turns also continues to point to the work of Barnes and Todd (1977, 1995) on the difficulty of managing turn-taking in whole class situations, and the importance of decentralising classroom communication.

The idea of focussing on the social aspect of talk, as Alexander (2001) suggests in his work on Culture and Pedagogy, precludes the idea of an extended cognitively challenging, dialogue with one pupil whilst the others listen. Similarly, there was no mention of the importance of pupil answers, with the posing of ‘checking up’ questions
being given priority. Although pupil talk was linked with the idea of learning, beyond this being on-task, and controlled, there were no suggestions as to how the teacher might probe, or extend, thinking, or any possibility of children raising their own questions.

5.4 Partner student researchers

Unlike Cycle 1, the revised questionnaire and data analysis enabled identification of a number of participants with a range of thoughts and beliefs. The three students invited to become partners in the collaborative action research project were identified principally because of the diversity of their views on imparting knowledge to children. Simon, Susie and Bill were all keen to join in a participatory action research project, which they felt would be able to help them develop as effective teachers. The following case studies paint a picture of each student teacher to give the reader a clearer picture of their initial beliefs and the development of their thinking as the course, teaching experience, and research project progressed.
5.5 Case study 2: Simon

Pen portrait.
Simon was over 25 and had a degree in philosophy. He had had more than two years paid employment in the primary classroom as a TEFL practitioner abroad.

Initial Questionnaire
At primary school Simon did not enjoy writing stories, loathed poetry, and read a great deal. He now saw talk as vital as a learning tool and believed communicating ideas helps us to define what we think. He acknowledged some individual working time is necessary in the school day, but that we learn best through communication. He thought teachers should encourage questions and help children to consider ideas raised through these. Regarding the teacher’s role in imparting knowledge, he stated: “Knowledge is not absolute. Conclusions drawn (knowledge) is [sic] not as important as the process gone through to get it.” Simon was the most ‘anti-imparter’ of the convenience sample.

Follow-up interview
One month after completing the questionnaire, Simon completed a semi-structured interview with me. The interview questions reframed and probed further the same concepts explored in the questionnaire, with the first attempting to probe more deeply his experience of talk as a primary pupil. It was hoped that this might offer an opportunity to make links between personal experience and current intuitive beliefs. Simon reflected that at school, talk had appeared to be teacher-led from the board. In his opinion, the role of his primary teacher was “an informer, imparting knowledge or instructions” so the pupils could complete the required task. He remembered it being a situation in which you were ‘talked at’.

In exploring the use of talk in the pre-course placement, Simon discussed the two different schools he had visited. In the first, he believed that the KS1 teacher engaged the children in guided dialogue, exploring concepts rather than ‘having a definite answer in her head which they were trying to get out’. Although he saw the talk as very teacher led, there had been a great deal of mathematical discussion, which seemed to relate to
developing appropriate vocabulary and discussing their predictions. By contrast, he felt the discussion in KS2 was task-focused rather than designed to elicit understanding of concepts “She would just give a 5 minute spiel on whatever the topic was, and then they’d get on with it. It was very ‘instructive’ with the focus on task, not discussion”. He added that although there was little elicitation, there was informal group discussion.

The next theme related to his construct of teacher identity in small group work, and how far this might relate to checking up on knowledge. Simon’s response here was, initially, less assured. Although he felt teachers might check up on knowledge to a certain extent, he saw an important aspect of the role was to ensure discussion stayed focussed. In the afternoon following the interview, he e-mailed me a further comment on the teacher’s role:

I think if the students are always bouncing off the teacher as their single resource, what they’re trying to do is directly get knowledge from the teacher rather than come up with a solution, or come up with a different question by themselves. I think the teacher’s role is really to keep them focused on the task through the discussions, maybe, not focused on a particular answer/conclusion.

In the interview, Simon also reflected on what it means to be a ‘learner’ and a ‘teacher’, and suggested the teacher might be “a librarian of knowledge” who understands how to point children in the right direction. Equally, he was eager to stress that children bring insight and observations that the teacher might not have considered.

Simon provided the lengthiest response to my probing of his ability to go beyond a literal understanding of ‘talk’ and ‘not talk’. He commented that if children are interested in what they are doing, they are able to ‘block out’ noise. To an extent, he felt that pupils could ‘hide’ in a noisy class, but that it could also be a sign of “debate, discussion, enthusiasm and motivated children and therefore a sign that learning is going on”. Drawing on his TEFL experience, he added that speakers in a quiet classroom sometimes feel ‘judged’ and their language is of a poorer quality as a result. Although he made implicit reference to noise levels, Simon felt that a learning dialogue is, by its nature, a noisy process of expressing, debating and vocalising ideas. Interested and engaged children will:
…say what they think and raise their voices to interrupt, or qualify someone else’s comment. These are not necessarily strictly controlled and so, by their nature, not very quiet.

The final question about imparting knowledge was designed to ascertain how far espoused beliefs in the importance of talk for learning, were mirrored by a belief that in an equal learning dialogue (a dialogic partnership), knowledge is not ‘imparted’ by the teacher. Simon’s immediate response to the notion of imparting was a loud and emphatic: “No. Absolutely not!” He elaborated on this at length, constructing his own understanding as he reflected on the nature of ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ and what it might mean to have confidence in your own teaching. An episode from his interview response, demonstrating his views on the teacher’s (or student’s) fear of silence is reproduced below:

You need to be able to leave the lesson plan if needs be; the whole lesson plan sometimes, and take it where the students are going. You’ll find it much easier to go with them than try to push them all in a different direction. I think that’s really important. I think it’s hard to do as well, cos I think you have to feel comfortable about you in the classroom; your lesson; you have to feel comfortable with the children as well, because if you’re not comfortable with that, you’re not flexible. The previous point is an opinion I hold very strongly. A lot of the psychological thing behind dialogic teaching is that you’re afraid of the silence, or noise, in class and so you feel the need to shove this knowledge into their heads i.e. you must do the speaking, but really it’s the class.

Simon went on to speculate that teachers might lack confidence in promoting dialogue because they themselves had not been encouraged to ‘discuss things, take risks, throw out ideas and things like that’. This might lead to the teacher always looking for the answers, ‘and it’s the answers in the teacher’s head already’. Reference to Alexander’s (2008) principles of dialogic teaching, and dialogic theory (Nystrand, 1997; Wells, 2009; Skidmore, 2006) indicated that Simon was favourably disposed to social constructivist principles, and more dialogic exchanges with learners.

5.5.1 Introduction to the use of video

As an introduction to the data collection and analysis process, towards the end of their first placement in the Autumn Term, the three participants videoed a short snapshot of themselves conducting dialogue with a small group of children. They were given an
analysis frame, and asked to decide who did the most talking; who asked the most questions; and to focus on a 5 minute episode to conduct a word count to confirm this.

Simon selected a 15 minute episode of book talk with a group of 3 year six children. In discussion with me, he reflected that he had not dominated the discussion, but had asked all the questions. A word count of the smaller time frame (5 minutes) indicated that the balance of adult-pupil talk was slightly weighted in his favour. ‘They don’t have a background of working like this, and they seemed slightly bemused’, he commented. At the end of the project, he told me that at this stage of the course he had believed that dialogic talk is only supposed to take place between the teacher and a very small number of pupils.

5.5.2 e-mail contact

At the start of the Summer term, following a meeting with participants to discuss the principles of dialogic teaching, and the structure of the project during their final teaching practice, I acted on Tom’s suggestion of weekly e-mail contact, regularly sending an open message to all 3 participants. Simon was the most regular correspondent, and, in particular, his e-mail of May 17th 2009 (reproduced in full below) showed engagement with the difficulties of promoting dialogic talk.

“I found it difficult to develop true class discussion as I ended up leading it – for fear of silence or loss of control.

As an aside, I can see quite clearly why teachers are afraid of the silence; they are afraid of loosing the class’s attention (or at least I was). To be able to allow a pupil thinking time and to unpick and individual’s thought through questioning requires good classroom behaviour control.

What appears to impede dialogue in the class is a social factor. The pupils do not appear to value and respect each other. I cannot be sure of the cause of this:

- Do they always choose their own groups? If so, has that given rise to social cliques?
- Is individual progress praised above group/class progress and has it led to a competitive atmosphere?
- As a teacher am I failing to make clear the values of collaboration, self-respect and respect for others?

My next step was not clear for me. I didn’t know whether I had the experience to address the issue directly and have a discussion with the class about it or to just do my best to reinforce the above-mentioned values in my teaching. My next step therefore is probably to discuss it with the class teacher.”

Fig. 13: Simon’s reflective e-mail
This deeply reflective writing encapsulated a number of issues raised by the literature, for example using talk as a means of class control (English et al, 2001), the competitive ‘bidding’ for attention discussed by Alexander (2001), and, tangentially, Lefstein’s (2010) contention that talk, by its very nature, is uncomfortable and even ‘confrontational’. Simon had clearly reached a stage in his practice when discussion with his mentor would be a key factor in determining the conduct of the rest of his placement, and possibly of his career. As discussed in Chapter 2, where teachers are unable to make explicit the rationale underlying their practice (Edwards and Protheroe, 2003; Jones and Straker, 2006; Spendlove, 2006) in order to move beyond the ‘how’ of teaching to the ‘why’, trainees may well default to the ‘observable’, and take the easier option.

5.5.3 VSRD in the final placement

At the end of the final placement, the three participants met me to take part in individual semi-structured interviews, to engage in the process of VSRD, and to discuss any further suggestions for the project.

5.5.4 Simon’s understanding of dialogic talk and its pedagogical purpose

The first area, which was probed, was Simon’s conceptual and pedagogical understanding of dialogic talk. He described it as ‘a very interactive thing’, going on to explain that, at its best, it comprises ‘questions and answers which are always relevant to each other, rather than a statement of opinion’. He qualified this further as ‘not a discussion.’ In Simon’s eyes, this ‘not discussion’ involved the teacher (and the pupils) ‘listening really carefully to ideas and responding to those ideas’. He believed the teacher had a role in managing a dialogue effectively rather than allowing it to be ‘two people talking about an issue rather separately in that they don’t ask questions and reflect on answers.’ He saw listening as key to developing understanding, expressing it thus:

In communicating something you are often misconstrued, so you have to listen carefully to be really sure that you understand what they are saying, and then, in a dialogic sense, you’d have to ask questions to clarify as well. So listening, it’s not such a loose term, it’s quite a tight term in dialogue.
Simon saw the purpose of dialogic talk as a philosophical exchange which could take place in any area of the curriculum ‘to critically explore ideas’. This included understanding other people’s ideas ‘properly’, and to being able to ‘criticise and evaluate their, and our own, ideas’. He saw it as an ‘incredibly important teaching tool, but added that there is a time and place, for not having a dialogue:

There are other cases, for example learning the times table, when it’s not appropriate…although you could, if you wanted to, have a dialogue about the nature of the times table, and the application of methods.

5.5.5 Simon’s critique of his promotion of dialogic talk and concerns about it

Simon provided a thoughtful and extensive critique of his lesson, and approaches to dialogic talk. In discussing his ‘Intentions and Purposes’ from the reflective framework, explaining that he wished to develop:

A more open discussion between class members, and to encourage children to share their ideas and to be able to value other people’s ideas and make a contribution as well.

He believed that the video showed that, regardless of how open his questions were, the children did still feel in some sense that they were answering a question related to writing targets and that was mostly what they talked about. He felt that there was a brief period of more ‘open’ discussion when they talked about the use of tragedy and contrasted it with happy memories, but in general it still seemed very restrictive as a dialogue. Only four of the six girls were voluntary contributors, and when he directly sought a contribution from one of the silent members by giving her three options, he felt she chose the last one because she thought that was the accepted, or ‘best answer to give because of how she thought I perceived it’.

In Technical Reflection, Simon stated that many of the children’s answers were general or descriptive comments. Further elicitation, for example, ‘I don’t quite understand what you mean. Can you tell me a bit more?’ and other Socratic questions to try to probe thinking, still produced generic statements, ‘I like your work. It’s got nice words. You’ve
used punctuation’ but no further qualification. Simon discussed the issues which had faced him when trying to implement dialogic talk. These fell into 5 main categories:

- Pupils can see discussion in English lessons as futile
- Difficulty in promoting open dialogue
- Objectives led teaching
- School ethos
- Demands of TP

Expanding on his first concern, he first discussed the difficulties which he felt were specifically connected with promoting dialogic talk in English lessons, using the word ‘futile’. He had felt himself the least successful in that subject, despite his very good subject knowledge, because it was so open ‘there is no real answer as a child could perceive it’. In maths, he felt, the children could see a reason for discussing the nature of odd and even numbers.

Overall, as he explained in his e-mail, he had encountered problems with getting his class to participate in discussion in which he felt they were expressing genuine thoughts and beliefs. He had become ‘disheartened with the lack of progress’, although he conceded that progress is hard to quantify in dialogue. In the video extract, he was attempting to have a directed dialogue with a small group and act as a ‘mediator’ but he commented ‘I haven’t opened dialogue’, despite his open questions. Simon was concerned that although he believed there would be ‘a whole wealth of answers that they could give because there’s no single answer’ the children have not responded freely. He commented:

I didn’t feel it worked and I wasn’t very happy with that dialogue as a whole, and I felt that it was, um, a series of small dialogues between me and a child, and the contributions that they gave seemed to be for fear of silence, rather than general thoughts.

The nature of the children’s ‘bland’ and ‘generic’ contributions he believed might be based on the model presented by teachers who gave ‘unquantified’ (presumably unqualified) responses, for example ‘Yes, that’s excellent, really thoughtful, really creative, I love what you’ve done with the language there’.
Simon was also concerned that a culture of objectives-led teaching has led to a belief that learning has only occurred when the objective has been met. Dialogue, he argued, might not necessarily provide an answer within the context of lesson objectives, but he was not sure how to plan for, and model, more open dialogue. In his school, he had found the culture, and the way they perceived young learners, as ‘less dialogic in nature’. Referring to the class’s previous teacher, he stated: ‘challenges to her, or her way of thinking were not accepted’. This ethos meant that in Year 6, ‘when asked, to contribute, or to ask a question…they appeared very concerned about giving the acceptable, or correct, answer.’ His final concern related to the number of things that are necessary to manage during teaching practice: he referred to this as being ‘overburdened’.

5.5.6 What Simon learned from the process of VSRD

One of the research sub-questions concerned ascertaining what contribution, if any, the process of VSRD made to development of practice. Although he commented that initially it was an imposition because of having to worry about setting up the video, sending out permission letters and training the TA to operate the camera, he realised the value of the process.

I look back on many clips, not just this one, especially in English lessons. I have found pieces of film that have caused me to change my lesson plans for the next day. Looking at my classroom assistant’s video, I was able to see the children’s problems better.

He went on to explain the way in which he believed the project, and VSRD, had caused him to re-examine his attitude to dialogue:

I have come to realise that my questions are not necessarily the questions they wanted to ask, or that they need to ask, they’re the questions I wanted to ask. I think that’s changed. I think I have more left the charge of learning, or of asking questions, up to the class. Because I don’t know the answer, and I don’t know the question to ask, I just open it up. I think that’s a fair statement.

Simon added that participation had helped him to become the sort of teacher that encourages opportunities for dialogue. He now asks pertinent questions occasionally, but tends ‘to stand back a lot more now and let them ask questions of each other’. It seems,
therefore, that engaging in the process did allow him to examine his teaching, particularly the nature of the questions he asked, but that the principal focus became one of assessment.

5.5.7 Analysis of Simon's commentary

Simon entered the project as the most openly reflective, and philosophical, participant. The literature review highlighted Black and William’s (1998) work on the importance of teaching learners how to reflect on thought processes rather than converge on the ‘correct’ answer. He was clearly able to ask the kind of questions which promote cognitive growth, discourage the search for ‘correct’ answers, and capable of probing a range of responses. It was apparent, however, that he became frustrated by what he deemed the children's ‘inability’ to respond. Chapter 2 draws upon the work of Stevens et al (2006) on cognitive dissonance, and the uncertainties faced by students who find it difficult to reconcile their personal beliefs about English, and the pedagogy and assessment methods they meet in school. This has some significance for the situation in which Simon found himself. With a strong epistemological sense that knowledge is not fixed, he found it hard to see the mentor, and other members of staff, as models within an intellectual community of practice. Where a restricted teaching repertoire appeared not only expected, but also respected, he became dissatisfied with his teaching. Although he did not become occupied with wearing the social, rather than pedagogic, mantle of teacher, he did shift emphasis from talk for learning, to assessment of writing.
5.6 Case study 3: Susie

Pen portrait
Susie was over 25 and had no experience in the classroom. She had a degree in French Studies, and was following the MFL route into teaching.

Initial Questionnaire
At primary school, Susie enjoyed literature. Her initial questionnaire showed that she believed talk was essential as a preparation for work and as a means of communication. She believed that as all children are different, it is sometimes good to work in quiet concentration. Susie positioned herself as a ‘guide’ in relation to developing knowledge, seeing the teacher as a facilitator, although she emphasised that "teachers can continue to learn".

Follow-up interview
Susie recalled few structured opportunities to talk at school, apart from answering questions about reading or getting to read her work aloud. She commented ‘it was about knowing the answers. I don’t remember discussing work’. She had little to say with regard to her experience of talk in the pre-course placement, although she did link her questionnaire statement that teachers can be learners too, to the talk observed in her placement classrooms. Although the talk she had seen was open-ended, it was still teacher-led and designed to probe reasoning, rather than pair discussion to develop personal or reflective response. She added “I’m thinking this now because of the way you teach us here”.

Susie’s view on the teacher’s possible role as a checker of knowledge was brief. She had conceived of it as promoting a two-way process, although not necessarily child-led, through the use of open questions. As a result of the university course, however, she was beginning to think that questioning could be ‘less didactic’ and more child-led, but was unable to expand on this. Although Question 4, which referred to quiet classrooms, was designed to probe beyond literal understanding of learning, she mostly commented on the literal, explaining that she would like to play music in her classroom. Susie was also
concerned about the pragmatic problem of noise levels when the teacher and other adults in her pre-course placement were all talking to their group. She briefly moved on to mention ‘children who are struggling’, adding that a learning conversation was often needed to help them understand.

Susie indicated that she believed imparting knowledge to be part of the teacher’s role, but that it should be “a two-way thing” in which the teacher assists children to gain skills and knowledge. She also saw this as encompassing ‘being aware that you are a key factor in a child’s development as a whole person’. Her responses indicated that she had very little prior knowledge, or experience, of the classroom, and had not specifically considered the concept of ‘learning’, let alone in relation to talk, before, although it could be concluded that she was broadly in support of social constructivist approaches to dialogue.

5.6.1 Intro to VSRD
Towards the end of her first placement, Susie captured 15 minutes of guided reading of a poem with 6 reception children. Her initial reaction was that ‘it was dreadful’, but further reflection on watching the video again led her to believe that the children were learning through discussion, but that it was ‘not what she had planned them to learn’. A word count of a 5 minute segment indicated that she had made more contributions than 3 of the children, but that one girl had spoken more than anybody.

5.6.2 e-mail contact
Susie generally did not respond to e-mails, although over half-way through her final practice she sent a communication explaining that she was concerned about falling behind her peers in making progress in her teaching. She followed this with another, commenting on the nature of the difficulties in promoting dialogic talk with her class, and the fact that she did not feel able to record a snapshot of dialogue. I wondered if she would withdraw from the project at this stage, but she did not.
“My class is an interesting one of chatty fussboxes, who enjoying talking but don’t yet have the skills/experience to be able to do so about their work! Have tried a couple of group and pair work activities with them but they don’t engage that fully and just want to present you with an answer - interesting - however I am determined to keep trying. After half term would like to do some discussion/thinking exercises e.g. asking them ‘What colour is Tuesday?’ so that they become more engaged with talking and not finding out answers.

Am hoping that the weather will improve so we can do more of these activities outside, the classroom is incredibly small, they are incredibly noisy and the TAs don’t seem to want them to make any noise! My acceptable noise levels always seem to be higher than anyone else’s - could be because I am a bit deaf?”

Fig. 14: Susie’s reflective e-mail

This reflection, coupled with the brief communication about ‘falling behind’, indicated the level of uncertainty in which Susie was operating. Crucially, as the participant with the least classroom experience, it was unfortunate that, as a MFL trainee, her second placement was undertaken abroad. The difficulty she appeared to be having in understanding the classroom ‘ethos’, and in engaging the children in work-related dialogue, indicated that she was in need of more focussed pedagogic guidance from her mentor.

5.6.3 VSRD in the final placement: Susie’s understanding of dialogic talk and its pedagogical purpose

Susie’s conceptual understanding of dialogic talk led her to define it as ‘Focussed talk with a purpose’. She explained that she felt that it had ‘direction’ and that it ‘enabled learning’, going on to label it ‘collaborative learning’. Its purpose was, she felt, to act as an empowering way for children to ‘find things out for themselves’ and to understand that ‘they do know things’. She saw it as a means of interaction, and working together, because she felt that in classrooms generally she had seen too much ‘hands up, I know the answer’.

Because dialogic talk was a ‘truly collaborative effort’, it was less about individuals, and more about helping children to see how good it is when ‘somebody’s taken your views, thought that they were really good ideas’. She described this as ‘a really lovely skill’. Susie also believed it to be about problem solving, although her language was vague, for
example, ‘doing a whole lot of life skills’, and ‘everybody has a worth and has their own thoughts and ideas, and it’s my general philosophy’.

5.6.4 Susie’s critique of her use of dialogic talk and concerns about promoting it

The difficulties Susie experienced in general classroom management and control in her final placement meant that she felt unable to complete an episode of videoed dialogue. She was, however, keen to continue to participate in the project, and asked to discuss the episode of talk captured in her first teaching practice. Her concerns in promoting dialogic talk fell into 3 main categories:

- School ethos
- Demanding children
- Self-assessment

Although emphasizing that the word she wished to use was not ‘concerns’, Susie did not supply an alternative, and whilst ostensibly discussing her first video extract, it was clear that in most cases it was actually the pedagogy of her final school which was the subject under scrutiny. School ethos, she believed, was what made it possible for children to learn from each other. Where children were ‘incapable of asking the person next to them’ adults would always have to work with low ability children. Susie felt strongly that there needed to be training so children understood why they were talking to each other, and about the importance of stopping and thinking first. She did not specify if this was training for teachers, pupils, or both, but added that it was important children were taught that ‘the first thing that you think of isn’t necessarily the best; that you can improve, you can think again and the reflection is good’. She referred to the ethos of her final school as ‘competitive’, comparing it with her second placement where learning was seen as more than ‘getting a big red tick at the end of the day’.

Again returning to her final placement, she described the children in her class as ‘independent characters, demanding of adult attention’ and constantly trying to prove themselves by putting their hands up and saying ‘something, rather than questions and thinking’. Teaching these children to be more collaborative, to learn from each other
through discussion, to reflect before answering, she found very difficult because they were so ‘demanding’.

The place of self-assessment was also raised as an issue. Susie felt that if children were given responsibility for their own learning, including the use of ‘traffic lights’ to assess their understanding, they would be able to learn more collaboratively.

It was clear from the discussion that Susie had completed the course with more of an idea of what she considered to be the place of talk in developing collaborative learning. Lack of prior experience, and difficulties with classroom management, had, however, prevented her from engaging, beyond a superficial level, with pedagogical innovation.

5.6.5 What Susie learned from the process of VSRD

Using the reflective framework, Susie did return to the first placement video, stating she was mostly interested in self-awareness and perceptual awareness. The clip had helped her to identify the number of closed questions she posed at this early stage of teaching, and the amount of talk that was ‘directional’ and about ‘crowd management things, even with a small group of children who were quite lively’. The process of reflection had, however, enabled her to think less about herself, and more about the children’s learning. Comparing the lesson with the understanding she had gained from college sessions, particularly guided reading, she reflected that she would have done more to prepare the work with them ‘rather than just asking direct questions’. She believed her questioning skills had improved ‘by osmosis’ and that watching, and discussing, the video was ‘a really empowering thing’. She was able to identify strengths in her interaction with children ‘to actually see it on screen, it’s very self-affirming’, and confirmed that it helped the process of becoming self-critical by linking observer’s comments with the reality of seeing, and understanding them.

Susie expanded on her decision not to conduct a piece of videoed talk at this stage. She firstly cited ‘a hectic time with it being summer term’, and many changes to the timetable.
She also felt ‘quite behind with things’ and not confident videoing herself with a ‘lively class’. The ‘crowd control’ she felt, was not there until the final week.

5.6.6 Analysis of Susie’s commentary

Although Susie had seen the video extract, and process of VSRD as ‘affirming’, having started the course as the least experienced, she remained, at the end of her training, lacking in confidence. Spendlove (2006) and Hall and Raffo (2003) suggest that successful behaviour management, and the practicalities of teaching, often result in reflections on pedagogy coming second to pragmatics. They argue that it is difficult for students to grapple with criticality whilst attempting to develop competence: particularly if they feel that critical reflection is “neither valued nor exemplified” (Hall & Raffo, 2003, p.2). Smith’s (2005) multidimensional frame of reference (see Chapter 2) refers to a second level of trainee need: safety: Susie was simply not ready, or able, to effect changes in teaching style based on her values.

Her preoccupation with behaviour management indicated that, although she passed the course, she was still operating in ‘survival’ mode. Chapter 2 made reference to the work of Harrison (2004), which suggests that many trainees enter their NQT year of teaching focused on performance rather than children’s learning. This seems to be such a case. If Susie’s induction tutor is unable to manage the complexity of the role, similarly there may be no significant shift in her conception of practice.
5.7 Case study 4: Bill

Pen portrait

Bill was over 25. He had a degree in Sport and Fitness, and some voluntary experience in the primary classroom.

Initial Questionnaire

Bill’s initial questionnaire indicated that he believed talk was important between teacher and children, and between children. He posited that questioning and discussion encourages and breeds learning. He thought that a quiet classroom might indicate that the children were sleeping, and that teachers should keep the talk going during group discussion. Bill was the most emphatic ‘imparter’ in the convenience sample; in his questionnaire response he stated:

*Imparting knowledge is very important as I feel children look to their teachers as a source of knowledge generally, and it is the teacher’s duty to deliver this.*

Follow up interview

Bill’s memory of talk at primary school as a child showed that he felt that the teacher did most of the talking, *‘When we were having a lesson it was very much led at the board. He stood by the board and talked and that would be it’*. He also remembered that they were ‘allowed’ to talk about anything when they worked in small groups, as long as they were not too noisy. He added that this was not related to learning *‘what we were talking about didn’t have to be what we were working on. I don’t think that really mattered’*. Bill undertook his placement in a school with which he was familiar; he described the talk as ‘aimed at the whole class’ with pupils nominated to answer. He added:

*There wasn’t a lot of time given for the pupils to actually talk amongst themselves, say for a problem. It would never be the fact of “This is the question, discuss it and we’ll come back and look at the answer”.*

He was clearly impressed that the talk was very ‘polite’ attributing this to the way the teacher herself addressed the children, but was unable to consider the way in which this might contribute to learning. He was rather uncertain about the role of the teacher in
group-work. Teachers, he felt, were probably looking to check up on knowledge although he believed ‘as long as the pupils are interacting, it’s more a social exercise more than anything’. He conceded the possibility of children changing their mind when they listened to others, but the important role, he felt, was for the teacher to act as a monitor “not stifling the talk of the talkers, but building up the non-talkers”.

Bill was keen to relate the concept of a quiet classroom to his introductory visit to his placement class. The teacher was playing quiet music as the children worked and this, he was sure, was good “because it sort of set the atmosphere and level of the noise”. This was a strategy he would be keen to use himself because he felt that children worked better that way. He went on to comment that it was not natural to ‘be sat silently… We’ve always got something to say, especially if it’s to a friend’. There was no reference to learning.

In his initial questionnaire, he had stated unequivocally that imparting knowledge was what teachers did. However, in the interview, he moved to a more hesitant “I think so”. After some discussion with friends, he had reached the opinion that good ‘imparting’ consists in drawing on your own experiences to contextualise what was being taught. He expanded on the importance of this:

The National Curriculum is obviously there to be taught, but there’s also the matter of life, and skills and things, and life experiences. Personally, for myself, that’s one of the reasons I was keen to get into finishing university and getting experience of life, because I wanted to take into a classroom.

There was no reference to drawing on the children’s experiences, however: this was still viewed as a one-way process. Bill could not be considered as broadly social constructivist in his thinking, nor did his beliefs share commonality with dialogic theory.

5.7.1 Intro to VSRD

Towards the end of his first placement, Bill captured 20 minutes of guided reading with a group of 5 able readers in Y6. He explained that he had been very careful not to dominate the discussion, and in fact the video showed that he had hardly spoken after
posing the first question. The children were intensely critical of the version of ‘20,000 Leagues under the Sea’ that he had chosen for them to read, and spent the entire episode analysing its shortcomings as a text to engage them. Bill explained to me that he had not really given enough consideration to the text when he selected it, and they were correct in their appraisal of it. He did not feel that he had managed the episode well, saying ‘it was all about them, really, I didn’t really say a lot in it’. The video indicated that he appeared to be focussing on two aspects of managing quality talk – that is, not dominating the discussion, or posing all the questions. Having made a number of tentative attempts to interject, which were ignored by the children, he simply allowed them to talk. His assessment that it was ‘all about them’ was correct; they were articulate and forceful in their opinions, describing themselves as ‘very good readers’; however, they were observably not willing to listen to any attempt to reframe the discussion.

Perhaps a more experienced teacher would have matched the text more closely to the children’s ability in the first place; one with stronger subject knowledge could have, perhaps, moved on from the original question about characterisation, to what each group member’s view was about techniques that make a ‘strong’ character. Unfortunately, this episode seemed merely to give more practice in talking to children who did not need it, and possibly reinforced Bill’s perception that his role was to impart information, leaving no room for dispute.
5.7.2 e-mail contact

Bill only responded once to my e-mail contact, highlighting the practical strategies he had adopted to develop talk.

"I have incorporated talking this week in the lessons I have taught.

This class is excellent with talk both amongst themselves and with adults. I have been working with all groups to speak with and listen to as many as possible.

There are certain 'big characters' in the class and groups that like to dominate discussion a lot of the time. I tried to combat this by highlighting in my lesson plans to try and encourage participation by all in all aspects of the lessons. I asked each group member to be given a role so that they needed to talk about what they were doing. Looking back at it I wondered if this sort of pressure to talk suited some of the children but felt it is an important skill to develop for some of them, especially as they are close to starting secondary school.

I encourage talk in lessons with a lot of open questions and try and get the opinion of ideas of individuals. Again some children responded well to this whilst some seem to worry that they don't know enough to answer confidently and will often answer 'not sure'. I think this is affected by speaking to a larger group as they have appeared to be more comfortable in smaller group conversation”

Fig. 15: Bill’s reflective e-mail

This reflection indicated that he was focussing on the ‘democratic’ idea of fair turns for all to speak, and was rather more concerned about non-participation than what was actually said. Talk appeared to be conceptualised as a communication tool which would be useful in secondary school, rather than as a means of developing cognition.

5.7.3 VSRD in the final placement: Bill’s understanding of dialogic talk and its pedagogical purpose

Rather than supplying a definition of dialogic talk, Bill explained what a teacher needed to do to promote it. The teacher needed to ‘encourage’ and ‘implement discussions amongst a group as small as two, or larger’. This encouragement would also focus on ‘listen[ing] to what’s going on and formulate ideas and questions thereon’. As in the questionnaire, he was still sure that a principal part of the teacher’s role was helping children to ‘keep it going amongst themselves so they work towards, maybe, a common goal, or a common theme’.

He was only able to describe one of the aims of dialogic talk in the vaguest of terms, showing little conceptual understanding, as ‘the whole speaking and listening thing with
the PNS and everything’, adding that children need to communicate with one another, to share ideas, and to engage with thinking in doing so. Although he had some difficulty in expressing the idea, he believed that when children explain ideas to each other, they are able to do so in a more readily understandable language.

5.7.4 Bill’s critique of his use of dialogic talk and concerns about promoting it

Bill discussed an episode selected from a 20 minute video of guided reading in which four Level 4 Y6 readers discussed a Greek myth. Using the reflective framework, he explained his role as ‘very watchful’ keeping the rhythm of discussion going, and listening to make sure the talk is ‘going where you want it to go’. Beginning with Perceptual Awareness, he drew attention to the fact that, although the children were talking, they were not listening to each other, and were directing their answers to him. He felt his initial instruction to discuss with each other was not sufficiently clear, and that despite beginning with an open request to tell him about the book, his own questioning was closed. Although he was clear that he wanted the children to discuss characters’ feelings and choices, ‘who fought and who didn’t fight, and what was going through their minds – was it fear?’ he was able to see that the children were more confused about the story than he initially believed. He thought this might have been why they were directing so many comments and requests for clarification about the characters and the plot to him:

I didn’t realise that they were doing that quite so much at the time. I thought that they were talking amongst themselves and I was trying consciously not to answer too much, but I wasn’t giving them enough time to answer. Was I just jumping in because I thought, “Oh, they’re not really responding to the question”?

Having reflected on the session, Bill felt that he could have given them some structured ideas of what they were meant to be looking for in order to actually focus the discussion more clearly. He reflected that his teacher, when using an open question, would ‘pick the children she knows she’ll get a response from... probably a higher ability from the English group’. This, he said, might be the skill of questioning.
Selecting Technical Reflection as an area for discussion, he went on to analyse his grouping strategy. When getting the children to talk as a four appeared not to work because ‘none had enough knowledge of the story to keep a conversation going’, being encouraged to talk in pairs further confused them. Commenting that two of the children were not fully engaged, Bill linked this to the social factors of boy/girl pairing. He went on to explain that some of the children regularly ‘come out with funny, silly comments. Playing to the crowd’, and indicated that he found this difficult to manage; particularly as the class teacher did not ‘beat down’ the ‘jokers’. This comment led into his concerns about promoting dialogic talk, which fell mainly into 5 categories:

- Time constraints
- The listening aspect of ‘speaking and listening’
- Importance of correct answers
- Difficulty understanding the concept of dialogic teaching
- Confidence
- Subject knowledge

For Bill, the primary difficulty was finding time and opportunity to ‘do’ dialogic teaching. He explained that post SATs, the work was not ‘following any kind of set rules’ and was mostly topic based. He moved on to the listening element of speaking and listening stating that although the children were ‘always ready to chat’, they were ‘not so great’ at listening. Talk was generally directed to the teacher, so the children were not used to listening to each other. He explained that since the adult normally asks the questions, and is the person who gives the praise and ‘evaluates’ the answer, children might think “Well, if I’m talking to my peers, how will I know if they are right?”

Bill also perceived that his understanding of dialogic teaching was not secure, although he had ‘been given the opportunity to probably look more into it, doing this research’. No one he had spoken to had known what it was, and although he knew he had ‘covered it’ on the PGCE course, he believed it ‘just gets bogged down’. He added that he had never seen dialogic talk used as the teachers he had observed use ‘mostly closed questions’. Promoting dialogic teaching took confidence, Bill stated, because you had to ‘step back’ and have less input; without that, you might not have control, and ‘especially if you are
not 100% sure of how dialogic talk works’, it affected your confidence. He believed he was a little more confident in asking questions and keeping them on task in the final placement, possibly as a result of better preparation. He linked this with subject knowledge, venturing to suggest that as his subject knowledge was more secure, he was more able to get involved in conversations. He expanded:

> If you’re not sure of a subject, necessarily, or a topic, I think especially as a trainee teacher it’s sometimes easier just to not answer it. Sort of, move on, kinda thing. Um, because you’re not sure in your own mind, and you’d rather avoid the error of passing on erroneous information, which you will possibly do any way. As a trainee, you are probably more aware that you shouldn’t be doing that.

He went on to explain that unless the teacher was part of the discussion, it was hard to know what was being talked about. A ‘big rowdy noise’ could actually be constructive talk, and quiet talk ‘could just be a conversation’. It is all part of the control and confidence in your own classroom.

5.7.5 What Bill learned from the process of VSRD

Bill insisted that he had found the process of VSRD useful, and had used the technique for himself in other lessons. He commented wryly that at times he thought a lesson had gone well, only to discover that ‘half the time they were staring out of the window, or they weren’t really paying attention’. He had used the process to develop his questioning and the way he set up the lesson. Because the children enjoyed being filmed, they also watched it back, but he did not clarify if this was for the pleasure of watching themselves, or if they had been able to learn from the experience. He also appeared to be using the experience as a means of developing classroom management; ensuring the talk ‘kept going’, and that all had a turn to speak. He still referred to ‘passing on erroneous information’, indicating that he still positioned himself as an imparter.

5.7.6 Analysis of Bill’s commentary

It seemed that for Bill, dialogic talk was simply a label attached to classroom discussion: one which was interchangeable with ‘interactive teaching’ or ‘pair talk’. Although he appeared to understand that there was some requirement to do more than ‘impart
knowledge’, the video extracts indicated that he seemed caught in the uneasy balance between promoting learning and retaining control reported by Barnes in 1976, and later, Edwards & Mercer (1983). This dilemma often caused him to do nothing at all, rather than intervene. The literature review examined the work of Alexander (2001) and Smith and Higgins (2006) on the crucial importance of keeping open lines of enquiry and avoiding non-committal judgment; specifically, the ability to extend answers beyond recall to more considered, discursive ‘think-aloud’ processes. However, although Bill retained ‘tight control’ of the questions, he was unable to use the answers as the fulcrum of the learning exchange. His comment about subject knowledge suggests that he was somewhat nervous about responses which might take him beyond his epistemological level of ‘certainty’. This appeared to be the case in the uneasy exchange during his first videoed interaction.

5.8 Group Exit Questionnaire

This section analyses the results of the responses of the exit questionnaire completed by the convenience sample of 23 student teachers at the end of their final teaching practice. As detailed in Chapter 3, the original questionnaire was amended to specifically probe memories of talk at school. The extra questions about dialogic talk were framed to provide data on the extent to which students were able to move from theory to practice. It was hoped that the amendments made to the taught English programme at university to foreground dialogic practice would inform the answers. Responses were initially analysed using the same codes as the entry questionnaire; additional codes and concepts were then added for the new questions. An overview of the analysis is presented in fig. 15 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>No. of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memories of talk in English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No recollection of talk</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few opportunities to talk</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-dominated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used positively</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk as a life skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skill</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skill</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows problems to be resolved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical beliefs about talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of peer talk</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of teacher talk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk as a learning tool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating ideas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing understanding</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for promoting talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careful planning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about the role of the teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing relevance</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating the environment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving everyone/Promoting equality</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiding thought</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing noise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting less able</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a role model</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards ‘noise’ in lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet classroom promotes learning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing a low noise level helps learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imparting &amp; developing knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as imparter/‘fount’</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as learning partner</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as facilitator of discovery</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about using talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise/control</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining dialogic talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/can’t remember</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided definition</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived ‘levels’ of use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No use</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to use of pair talk</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to use of group talk</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 16: Categories and themes from the data
5.8.1 Talk histories

The new question on memories of talk indicated a number of things: almost half had no recollection of talk at all; few remembered it being used in any other way than monologic situations, with just over half describing it as little used or ‘teacher dominated’. Comments included ‘it was generally only allowed between pupil and teacher’, and mention was also made of ‘having to sit in silence most of the time’ and being encouraged to ‘stay quiet’. One respondent elaborated: ‘very much teacher talking to or at pupils rather than a discussion or dialogue’, and another, ‘there was much more focus on having neat handwriting’. The two respondents with positive memories indicated that in their classrooms, talk had been used to ‘share ideas’ and ‘it was used a lot – constructively. Always encouraged to openly talk/discuss/give opinions’. This positive recall was the exception.

5.8.2 Pedagogical beliefs

Responses to the exit questionnaire were, however, considerably briefer than to the original, but generally the sample remained very positive about the use of talk in the classroom. There was a marked change in the number of qualifying references to behaviour management, controlling and ‘policing’ the dialogue, with only one remarking that it ‘helps secure understanding if children are on task’, compared to eleven such comments at entry. A further concept, ‘Talk as a learning tool’ was created, since many respondents were now specific about the links between pedagogy and learning. Communicating and discussing, for example, were related explicitly to ‘moving understanding forward’ and ‘helps children learn from each other and consolidate ideas’, rather than the generic statements about using these as pedagogic strategies written at the start of the course. Although questioning was still seen as the teacher’s remit, one respondent explained this strategy as a ‘providing key questions to encourage children to think more deeply’, rather than simply checking up on knowledge.

5.8.3 The role of the teacher

The role of the teacher was still regarded as managing relevance, but less as a referee of fair turns for all, with a dramatic reduction from an initial 18 comments stating this, to 4. A
new code, ‘creating the environment’ was used to differentiate remarks alluding to the importance of ‘stepping back’, ‘ensuring children could talk without being ridiculed’ and understanding that they were ‘free to express their views’. This indicated a realisation that the teacher needed to do more than ensure that all spoke, by setting up conditions in which they felt willing, and able, to speak.

At the start of the course, 9 students had positioned themselves as ‘imparters’, 12 as ‘guiders’ and 2 as ‘facilitators’; the final data showed a negligible shift to 8 imparters, 13 guides and 2 facilitators. If anything, the imparters were more emphatic about their opinions, stating that by imparting knowledge, the teacher gives ‘a basis for the children to want to learn’; one wrote that it was ‘very important – isn’t that how we learn?’ and another that it was vital knowledge was imparted ‘on’ children. One comment is shown here in full:

*The teacher should set & deliver the subject in group talk. It is very important to impart knowledge as children cling on to information that interests them.*

From this, it was tempting to conclude that, despite engaging with the theory and practice of collaborative group work, and pair discussion, for some, the job still remained at heart about using talk to impart knowledge.

### 5.8.4 Conceptualising Dialogic talk

Disappointingly, the data showed that of the 23 participants, almost a third felt unsure about the concept. This smaller group comprised students who thought they might have heard the term, and one who claimed never to have come across it. One wrote ‘*Two-way talking? I don’t know; it’s one of those words!*’ Over half the sample provided a definition; these are reproduced in full in the following table, since it is interesting to note that where a definition was supplied, ‘dialogic’ could equally be substituted for ‘interactive’, ‘pair’, ‘collaborative’ or ‘class’ discussion. Responses 1, 2 and 3 are those of the case study students.
1. Dialogic talk is a very interactive thing where questions and answers are always relevant to each other. It isn’t two people talking about an issue rather separately in that they don’t ask questions and reflect on answers.

2. Being able to listen, understand, & reflect on talk.

3. Children learning from each other & from themselves, finding answers by reflecting.

4. Process of dialogue & communicating with others in a two-way (or more) process.

5. Learning through talk in partner, group or class discussion, but am confused by the different definitions I looked up for my assignment.

6. Use of talk partners, discussion groups & children in control of learning.

7. Talking through the steps or talking aloud?

8. Learning through talk in partners, groups, etc.

9. Discussion with peers around/about the subject where the teacher is there to observe & only intervene when necessary; A 2 way process of sharing views.

10. Talking with peers to facilitate learning.

11. Questioning children appropriately to dig further into their knowledge or ascertain what they learn.

12. Discussion within classes I think.

13. Talk between two people where they take turns and both have an input.


15. Learning through talk in dialogue between children, teacher & children.

16. Speech-like talk in that it’s a conversation/discussion between people.

---

**Fig. 17: definitions of dialogic talk**

As Moyles et al’s (2003) work on interactive teaching suggested, talk per se appeared to be viewed by the ‘definers’ group as a ‘good thing’. However, there was little evidence of conceptual understanding, or engagement beyond surface features. Statements such as ‘talking steps through’, ‘only intervening when necessary’ and ‘taking it in turns to speak’ indicated a remaining confusion about the teacher’s talk role. There was also a quantity of vague talk-related vocabulary about pair discussion, or ‘talk for learning’, and even two of the three participants (Susie and Bill) were not able to demonstrate any greater understanding than the non case study students.

Information was also sought on the group’s perceived levels of use of dialogic talk. This, together with the definitions above, indicated that, despite my belief that I had grounded
the postgraduate English sessions even more securely in the principles of dialogic talk, and explicitly modelled this in, for example, guided reading, it had not been as successful as I had assumed. The following table indicates the range of situations in which group members believed they had attempted to open up dialogic communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>No. of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No use of dialogic talk</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure/don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of dialogic talk in pairs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of talk partners</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working things out in partners</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed ability partners</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of dialogic talk in groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk before writing</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging sharing of children's thoughts/ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children questioning each other</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried, but children did not manage</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other use of dialogic talk</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant interaction with individuals</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 18: Using dialogic talk

The data showed that 6 participants believed they had not used it, or were not sure if they had or not. Those who felt they had used it through promoting pair talk were generally unable to elaborate beyond stating that they had ‘used talk partners in all lessons’, although there was some mention of ‘brainstorming’ and ‘promoting mixed ability pairing’. Overall, it seemed that these students did not understand the concept, and confused it with providing opportunities for talk.

The 8 respondents who referred to using it in group work included the 3 case study students. There was some conflation of dialogic talk and recent school-based training on talk for writing, reflected in comments such as ‘lots of group talk before writing; lots of questioning from me & oral rehearsal’. There were also references to encouraging children to ‘discuss and formulate ideas’, to ‘share their thoughts’ and one mention of ‘questioning each other’. There was more evidence of reference to the ‘supportive’ aspect of dialogic talk, but still no mention of collective, cumulative or reciprocal features.
involving the teacher. Respondents appeared to see their role as a facilitator rather than a co-learner, or participant. Interestingly, the 3 case study students all wrote that they had attempted to use it, but that the pupils were used to being required to produce one correct answer, often as quickly as possible, and found the more ‘uncertain’ approach too difficult to respond to.

It was with some concern that I noted one respondent who had provided a definition of the concept as ‘a process of dialogue & communicating with others in a two-way (or more) process’, had gone on to comment s/he had managed dialogic talk through ‘constant interaction with individuals through the school day’. This student appeared to believe that the ‘two-way process’ was indeed a dialogue between teacher and child, and had no connection with the cumulative and reciprocal features of the dialogic classroom.

5.8.5 Emerging themes
The exit data on conceptual, and pedagogical, understanding of dialogic teaching proved depressing reading. It appeared that the group was still focused on the notion of lessons driven by their teaching, in what Alexander (2006) refers to ‘teaching as technique’, rather than the pupils’ learning, and it seemed that generally they remained in close control of dialogue. It is understandable, however, if we consider what Myhill (2006, p.20) refers to as “the multifaceted ways in which talk can play out in the classroom”, that trainee teachers suffer confusion about what their talk role should be, especially if they are being asked to add a strategy that their teachers do not have in their pedagogic repertoire. However, on a more positive note, there were instances of attempts to create interactive opportunities for children to share and exchange ideas, solve problems, and achieve common understanding, and to enact ‘teaching as facilitation’ (Alexander, ibid) in respecting individual differences between pupils.

The literature review indicated (Merry, 2004; Galton et al.1999), that the concept of interactive teaching was poorly defined in the Framework document (DfEE, 1998a, p.2) with little guidance for practitioners. Since dialogic teaching receives scant mention, and no guidance at all: the difficulties in engaging with it are consequently even greater than with interactive teaching. Brown and McIntyre (1995) refer to a ‘deficit model’ of inset, and
Moore (2004) of the growth of pragmatism, which militate against teachers and trainees engaging with curriculum initiatives. Perhaps, as Mezirow (1991) suggests, existing ‘meaning schemes’ had simply allowed the sample to accommodate the information into their existing, and unchanging, philosophy.

As Chapter 2 suggests, the need to develop a teaching identity is generally viewed (see for example, Smith, 2005; Maynard, 2000; Hayes, 2000) as the prime factor in completing teaching practice; developing cognitively stimulating discourse is merely one small part of this complex process. Alexander (2006) defines the difference between discussion and dialogue, seeing the former as ‘an exchange of ideas with a view to sharing information’. On the whole, the group appeared to manage the pupil-pupil aspect of this, if not the teacher-pupil relationship. Dialogue, he explains, is the process of using “structured, cumulative questioning and discussion which guide and prompt, reduce choices, minimise risk and error, and expedite the handover of concepts and principles” (p. 30).

In learning not to dominate talk, the students mistook their silence, or organisational strategies, for teaching. Wells and Ball (in Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008) write persuasively about adopting a dialogical stance in the classroom. This, they state, is about more than ‘piecemeal’ strategies such as increasing wait-time; it is more about creating a classroom in which all (including the teacher) understand that their ‘findings’ are open to “critical review and improvement” (p.183). Where all concerned are working together to become agents in their own learning, ‘deficiencies’ in subject knowledge might not present a barrier to a more collaborative search for understanding.

5.8.6 Reflection on Cycle 2

Although issuing the questionnaire to the whole cohort this did present unforeseen difficulties in the time required for analysis, and coding, it was instructive to note that over half of the students had begun their course seeing their talk role as, essentially, imparting knowledge. This led to an adjustment in English session design to explore these notions. It was also interesting, yet disappointing, to see that not one student mentioned talk whatsoever, even drama, as an aspect of English they enjoyed at primary school. I had
anticipated that this would be one of the factors I would consider when selecting research participants. It was also disappointing that two students who had provided particularly contradictory responses to ‘the place of talk’ and ‘the importance of imparting knowledge’ had ticked that they preferred not to be interviewed. It would have been interesting to see how one in particular would reconcile his opinion that discussion helps children to learn together, with his view that the teacher’s role is to speak clearly, and that imparting knowledge is extremely important, as “the child will look at school at that age fondly and remember such lessons for the rest of their lives”. Further, two students with a very strong sense of the fixed nature of knowledge, and the importance of imparting this, proved to be hesitant and tearful in their (unrelated) personal tutorials. It was clearly not ethically appropriate to invite them to participate in a probing interview and collaborative action-research project.

I had decided at the start of the project that it would be entirely inappropriate for me to be the case study students’ teaching practice supervisor, but, as I suspected, it became difficult to maintain a dialogic relationship with them. Although I saw my role as a collaborative participant in the research, the students clearly looked to me for judgment as an expert, and there were times when I found it difficult to refrain from feeding back on videoed episodes of teaching, as an experienced mentor. I was also aware that I had formed preconceptions about what I was likely to see, based on the questionnaire and interview data. It was also difficult to contextualise their experiences, as I did not visit their schools, and had no way of critically considering their perceptions of, for example, the school ethos.

Although Tom, in Cycle 1, had been strongly in favour of a regular e-mail contact, the three participants in Cycle 2 clearly found this yet another demand on their time, and the length, regularity and reflective nature of e-mail responses varied greatly between the participants. On the whole, this did not prove to be particularly fruitful, particularly as the participants elaborated on the contents of their e-mail in the final episode of VSRD.

A further complication was the fact that two of the three participants were following the MFL route into teaching. This meant that their second teaching practice took place
abroad, and the final practice in yet another school in the South West. This did not prove as difficult for Simon, with his good subject knowledge and TEFL experience as it did for Susie. Beginning the course with no prior classroom experience, and having a ‘lively’ class on her final placement, was a blow to her self-image, despite her apparent confidence and thoughtful dialogue in English sessions at university.

Cycle 3 therefore needed further changes to the research design: the entry and exit questionnaire were not serving the purpose for which they had been designed; the English course needed further adjustment; there needed to be a strategy to ensure the students were able to video, engage in VSRD, and then continue their practice. Finally, despite providing the participants with a video camera and a data recorder, the quality of sound was not good. It began to be clear that, although I should not be the practice supervisor, I needed to be physically present during the recording to complete field notes. I also decided, if possible, to exclude MFL route trainees from the case studies. After giving a great deal of thought to the questionnaire, and ways to avoid leading respondents, I decided to make the data collection process part of a larger task that all students would complete in building a literacy history of themselves. This would involve separate reflections on reading, writing and speaking and listening. The revised data collection task is discussed at the start of the following section.
Chapter 6: Dialogic approaches in five classrooms: Cycle 3 data analysis.

This chapter provides an overview of the final research cycle, and in particular, an analysis of rich data provided by responses of both the convenience sample and the five case study participants. It offers a more particular picture of practice-in-action through the use of field notes, and reflective writing. The chapter begins by examining the talk histories collected from the literacy biography completed by a whole cohort of 75 Postgraduate Student Teachers, and moves on to detail 5 individual case studies relating to the research participants. It concludes with a discussion of emerging themes.

6.1 Talk Histories in the Literacy Biography

With its quotation about classroom talk, and writing prompts, the Talk History prompt (see Appendix 4) generated a great deal of writing and a wealth of rich data. A content analysis was conducted on the reflection of each student in the cohort, breaking the text down into manageable categories. Responses were initially coded according to the five general prompts on the biography sheet: 1) Opportunities for debate and collaborative discussion; 2) Who led discussion; 3) Questioning; 4) Opportunities to question and challenge peers and the teacher; 5) Putting up your hand. They were then re-coded into main themes and further sub-coded into concepts. Analysis of the results showed that 14 of the 75 students could remember little, or nothing, about talk at school, and had nothing further to add. Of the remaining 61 students, a wealth of data was returned showing fresh, and often painful, memories of the experience of engaging in classroom discussion – or of remaining silent. The following section presents an overview of the responses.

6.1.1 Opportunities for debate and collaborative discussion with peers

For most students, the classroom was remembered as a silent place; 44 stated specifically that they were given no opportunities to discuss work with peers, writing that the teacher did the talking and the children the listening. In these the classrooms, it was clear who was ‘in charge’ of the talk (Alexander 2005; Barnes 1976). Rather than
engaging in the co-construction of knowledge (Mercer, 2000) silent work and ‘getting on’ was praised, with the playground seen as the place for talking. ‘There were lots of commands for silence and “shh! Fingers on lips”’, commented one respondent, and another ‘I spent most of my foundation stage sitting silently with my fingers on my lips; talking seemed to be wrong’. This notion of talk being ‘wrong’ was a recurrent theme. ‘Talk,’ commented one student tersely, ‘was usually followed by a telling off’. Opportunities to engage in any sort of discussion were linked with perceptions of what constituted, in the teachers’ eyes, good behaviour.

Some experience of collaborative discussion was recalled by 7 students, although this was always associated with one particular teacher, rather than as part of a whole school ethos. One wrote of the change in learning experience when she moved to Singapore, recalling in some detail discussions, role-play and collaborative work. A qualified response was offered by another student who remembered ‘a wonderful teacher who encouraged us to talk and give our opinions, if he was interested in the subject’ (my emphasis). An insightful reflection from another, questioned how far the fact that she always worked with the ‘top table’ meant she only spoke to children with similar ability and background. As Lefstein (2010) comments, in critical discussion, we need opportunities to alter our horizons of meanings through discussion with others. For most students, there seems to have been little opportunity to do so.

One particularly interesting comment was ‘although we were put into debating teams, we were told what viewpoint to take. It wasn’t based on personal opinion’. Overall, classrooms do not seem to have been characterised by genuine debate or collaborative discussion. Where peer talk did take place, it was social, rather than exploratory (Mercer et al, 1999), and viewed as a ‘treat’. Teacher-pupil talk was viewed as communicative and instructional, rather than cognitive.

6.1.2 Ownership of discussion

Despite the deliberate use of the word ‘led’ in the prompt, over half the students wrote passionately, and at length, about the nature of the power relationship in teacher-
dominated talk. Several mentioned being ‘talked at’; about ‘knowledge being delivered’ and ‘being required to sit and listen’, and one respondent commented that reading aloud was the nearest her class got to being allowed to speak. The majority of comments, it must be said, did not refer to discussion, which implies more than one voice, but supported the work of Mercer (1995), Galton et al (1999) and Alexander (2001; 2005, 2008) on the prevalence of monologic knowledge-transmission. ‘It was all teacher-led in a transmission way’ and ‘the teacher stood at the front and imparted knowledge’ reflected the experience of over 30 respondents, summed up by one as ‘all listening, no communicating!’ As Myhill and Brackley (2004) remind us, teacher discourse can both exclude children’s own prior knowledge, and be used as a means of establishing a particular power dynamic between teacher and learner.

Of the 12 students who wrote about their positive experiences of engaging in discussion, 11 again associated this with one particular teacher, ‘I consider myself lucky’ commented one, ‘my excellent Y1 and Y6 teachers encouraged us to discuss anything that interested us’. One wrote ‘there were opportunities to do show and tell and read out good work’: an interesting perspective on the subject of who actually managed and led the experience.

Again, the students’ own classrooms were generally recalled as places for listening, not dynamic environments where collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful dialogue (dialogic talk) was promoted.

6.1.3 Questioning

The reflections on questioning indicated that this was overwhelmingly in the teacher’s remit, unless it related to a request for clarification. Raising questions was, however, seen as a risky business by 10 respondents; this was an indicator that ‘you hadn’t listened’.

One student reflected on the waste of learning time associated with this:

*The teacher talked, then you were given work to complete in silence. When you put your hand up, you had to wait till the teacher got round to you. This meant waiting around for a long time doing nothing.*

14 students linked questioning to a strategy for class control; in summing up this perception, a typical comment was ‘the teacher liked to get someone who was talking,*
rather than listening, to answer’. The call for pupils’ responses to be the fulcrum of the learning exchange (Alexander, 2005, 2008; Smith and Higgins, 2006) is interesting. 4 students specifically raised this issue stating, for example, ‘we weren’t really involved in the learning process,’ and another ‘although she asked questions, she explained herself rather than asking for answers. It was about getting her point across’. One student felt that the teacher moving on, rather than expanding, after a correct answer had been given to a closed question created ‘a divide’ between the more and less able. Only a small number (3) had positive memories of being questioned, and this related to a wish to demonstrate that they knew the answer. Over half the respondents made reference to ‘one correct answer’, the expectation of being able to provide it, and the ‘nervousness’ of waiting for the evaluative comment. A narrow view of prior knowledge (Myhill & Brackley, 2004), ‘Interrogation’ (Mroz, 2000) ‘presentational talk’ (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008) and an IRF structure appear to have shaped classroom interaction, and for most, being questioned (or asking questions) was remembered as a frightening and lonely experience designed to catch them out.

6.1.4 Opportunities to question and challenge peers and the teacher

Almost half the students felt they had no real voice in the classroom, and that their opinions did not count. ‘The teacher’s view was final’ and ‘it was a case of being given facts, which we had to accept’, is representative of most comments. Two students remembered the feeling that their teachers were ‘annoyed’ or even ‘enraged’ because they wanted to question and discuss further, and a further two used the emotive phrase ‘ridiculed’. One student recalled clearly a particular incident:

I remember vividly questioning the teacher’s input on the water cycle based on something my dad had told me about rain at sea when he was in the navy. My teacher shot me down in flames and there was no praise or encouragement for independent thought.

This type of dismissal may relate to teachers’ tendency to view prior knowledge as relating to school-based activity (Myhill & Brackley 2004), rather than something that may be acquired beyond the classroom and the school setting. In this way ‘school knowledge’ becomes the valid currency at the risk of being non-transferable to real world situations
(Eisner, 1996). The feeling of shock at the teacher’s response to being questioned, either by the student themselves, or a friend, were significant for 5 respondents who learned from this to remain silent. Only one made a positive comment, stating that her infant teacher had encouraged the children to ask questions. No participants mentioned questioning peers, or being questioned by them; this seems to reinforce their scant experience of a more collaborative approach to discussion.

6.1.5 Putting up one’s hand

The issue of raising one’s hand elicited more responses than any other prompt, often featuring in comments throughout the writing, with 21 students using expressions such as ‘fearful’, ‘anxious’ and ‘awkward’. One particularly telling statement was ‘my earliest memory is being told to put my hand down “not you!”’. The consensus appeared to relate to a fear of giving the wrong answer, in some cases because this might simply lead to ridicule, but for some students ‘this was not a discussion about learning as a process...why answers might be wrong and how the right answer might be discussed’. As with questioning, the putting up of hands was also associated in 5 respondents’ minds with a strategy to punish children who were not listening. Of the 4 who had positive feelings about raising their hand, 2 mentioned the importance of their teacher’s encouragement and the remaining 2 attributed it to the fact that they were ‘bright’.

If exploratory or dialogic talk requires an ethos of confidence to be developed, it seems significant that only 4 students stated that they were confident to volunteer answers. 20 wrote at length about the issues related to raising their hand that still affected them as adults. Examples of this ranged from being given derogatory nicknames by the teacher; being told they were ‘less able’ or ‘a nothing’, and being ridiculed. One student wrote

You were not allowed to talk unless you were ‘picked on’, and that’s what it felt like. Humiliated and singled out. If you got it wrong, you were ‘stupid’, thus no one wanted to contribute. I still feel very self-conscious when I raise my hand today.
6.1.6 Analysis of the reflective writing

The talk histories from the literacy biographies painted a vivid, but possibly unsurprising, picture of the state of talk in primary classrooms over the last 40 years. The age range of trainees – from 21 to 50 – indicated that, on the whole, practice had not moved on significantly since Barnes’ (1976) call for learners to take a more active part in constructing their own knowledge through talk. In classrooms where the teacher retained close control of the dialogue (Skidmore et al. 2003), and asked few authentic questions, the discourse style remained authoritarian (Haworth, 1999), with pupils bidding for turns to speak. This appeared to be the experience of the majority of the cohort. The nature of the writing indicated a perception that the balance of ‘talk power’ was heavily weighted in the teacher’s favour, and many were quite bitter about it. It appears they were not given ‘permission’ to be catalysts for learning (Young, 1992) by agreeing, disagreeing, or asking for more information about claims made, even by the teacher. I began to question how far these negative memories might act as a barrier to using classroom talk for cognitive, rather than social and behavioural, purposes. Wells and Claxton (2002) speculate that it is precisely such formative experiences, which prevent the development of collaborative communities of enquiry in the classroom.

6.2 Selection of the case study partners

Following the completion of the biographies, 60 students expressed an interest in participating in the research project; from that number, 8 students, showing as widely differing responses as possible, were selected as a purposive sample. It was hoped that working more closely with such a diverse group would provide a more detailed picture of the values, beliefs and experiences of students, and the way in which they might impact on practice. As the academic year unfolded, three of the original participants withdrew from the project. This happened by default, rather than formally, and the students either stopped responding to e-mail, or continually altered the dates they had nominated for capturing video data. The following section presents case studies of the five remaining participants, drawing on a range of data sources to provide as clear a picture as possible for the reader. They comprise:
• a pen-portrait of each student;
• extracts from the initial written reflection on talk;
• amplification from a follow-up interview;
• student reflection on the first engagement with the process of VSRD during his or her initial school experience;
• contextual information from researcher’s field notes, made during the lesson selected by the participant for video analysis;
• a written (by e-mail) reflection by each participant one week after the VSRD;
• an interview with the researcher 2 weeks after the VSRD.
6.3. Case study 5: Francesca

Pen-portrait
Francesca was 28 years old. Rather than studying for A levels, she took an NVQ in childcare and worked as a nursery assistant, then nursery manager. She went on to work for 3 years as a TA whilst taking a day-release degree in Childhood Studies.

Initial reflection on talk
In her initial written reflection, Francesca recalled discussion in her own primary education as teacher-led and competitive. This led to feelings of frustration if there was no chance to share ideas or ask questions; she was sure that this had made it easy to disengage. At secondary school, she was awarded a higher grade in Speaking and Listening than in other aspects of English, yet felt that this aspect seemed less valued. These feelings of frustration led her, at FE & HE level, to make notes and research independently, rather than question the tutor.

Follow-up interview
In her interview, Francesca elaborated on the competitive ‘bidding’ for attention that she had found so frustrating. She explained that at times she still wanted to ask, or answer questions, ‘I’m desperate, and that old classroom thing comes back. I want to put up my hand and go “Me! Me! Me!” and I think I’m a bit old for that now.’

Although not included in her written reflection, she also discussed the experience of being ‘picked on’ if you did not have your hand up. This, she felt, was managed in a way contrary to the notion of being asked to demonstrate knowledge. She also felt that the underpinning ethos of her school was that the teacher always knew better, regardless of what was being discussed. Francesca was keen to try a variety of strategies for promoting purposeful talk herself, and thought that engaging in role play in university sessions would be a good way to promote this. Her interview indicated that she was well disposed towards social constructivist and dialogic principles, although she did not name them as such,
6.3.1 First encounters with VSRD

During her first placement, Francesca videoed what should have been a short episode of literacy with her Reception/Y1 class as they generated ideas for a story. She discussed this with me enthusiastically, commenting particularly on the level of participation by the children. She felt that she had not dominated the discussion, although she had not calculated the number of words spoken by participants during a five-minute episode, as requested. She felt, in retrospect, that she had spent too long in discussion with the children, although her class teacher reassured her that they had sustained concentration well, and produced some high-level responses. On viewing the video, I would support both Francesca, and her teacher's comments: at 45 minutes the episode was rather long, although high-level talk was occurring. Francesca was clearly in charge and posing all the questions, but her feedback moved beyond a simple positive or negative comment, and reformulation of responses clearly signaled approval.

6.3.2 Contextual information drawn from field-notes

The lesson Francesca selected for VSRD took place half way through her final practice, in a mixed Foundation/Y1 class of 15 children in a rural primary school. This literacy lesson was planned to follow on from her class teacher's input during the previous week. Francesca worked initially with the whole class, beginning by telling the children that they would be able to talk to each other and it would be ‘fun’.

Although her verbally stated objective was developing the children's imagination when describing a setting, she was not completely clear herself, or with the children, about what she wanted to achieve. There was some confusion about whether they were expected to retell a story they had been working with (Jack & the Beanstalk); a new version of the same story; or a different story. After five minutes, it seemed that a recap of the original version was required, although when a child offered a contribution not from the original she responded ‘There might be a dog in your version, Jack’. The precise nature of the task was not clarified at any point. Most of Francesca's questions were closed (‘who/what?’) but some evaluative ones were also posed (‘how do you think he felt?’ ‘What do you think he's thinking as he ran home?’), and children invited/nominated
to agree/disagree/contribute. All children were articulate and keen to contribute; for example following a statement by Francesca, a Y1 boy interjected indignantly, “Excuse me, it’s not about the amount [of beans]; it’s because his mum was expecting money”. Although children were praised for offering contributions, these were not probed or extended. All voluntary contributions were from boys.

In the second part of the lesson, group work, the Reception children worked collaboratively with the class teacher to record what Jack could see from the top of the beanstalk. In practice, it was very difficult to hear the children’s contributions over the teacher’s voice, even though the group was working at the other end of the very large classroom. Francesca engaged with Y1 who worked in groups of 3 to develop their understanding of what a question is. They formed questions using their senses: what might Jack have heard/seen/felt. Although they managed the co-operative nature of the task well, all their questions were closed. Francesca then moved into role as Jack and the children asked her the closed questions they had formulated. In response to their short, closed questions, she offered very long, extended answers, dominating the talk, and at times playing ‘guess what’s in my head?’ Without any specific teaching about the kind of questions required, the children then worked in pairs to ask each other questions in role as Jack or his cat. Unsurprisingly, all were closed (did you see/do this?). Francesca’s modeling of extended answers had not helped them form more open questions.

They went on to produce some interesting drawings independently, which was accompanied by a stream of imaginative commentary and justification.

**6.3.3 e-mail reflection**

Immediately following the observation, I received an unhappy e-mail from Francesca, who felt her lesson had been unsatisfactory from start to finish. After a reassuring response from me, she left a complete week before viewing the video, and sent a more measured reflection in which she picked up (independently) on some of the points I had made in my field notes. She noted her lack of clarity:
I wasn't absolutely clear about what I wanted the children to get from the lesson. Did I want descriptive language or was I more interested in getting them talking to one another about the topic?

She went on to examine the way in which her discussion in role could have been more effective in guiding the children to form more open and evaluative questions:

The children were good at asking closed questions but did not build upon ideas by listening to questions asked by others. I have considered the idea of having had a child in role as Jack so that I could model open-ended questions as I found it very difficult not to elaborate on my answers while in role. This was because I wanted to model descriptive language to the children to support their literacy target. However, if I did this again I would like to see how the children reacted to shorter answers that were guided by their questions.

Francesca understood that, although it is important for the teacher to act as a role model in developing language and vocabulary, simply talking more does not enable the children to develop their own ability to ask open questions. Interestingly, she did not refer to the apparent domination of talk by the class teacher – given the nature of research literature on ‘interactive’ teaching, these children may well have learnt by Y1 that questions are what a teacher asks.

6.3.4 VSRD Francesca’s understanding of dialogic talk and its pedagogical purpose

A further week after the VSRD, Francesca and I met for a semi-structured interview, and I began by probing her pedagogical and conceptual understanding of dialogic talk. She understood it to be a type of conversation in which children interact in response to each other’s statements, defining it as ‘a conversation whereby a statement is made and another child says something relating to that statement and it kind of bounces backwards and forwards’. She stressed that this verbal encounter need not push towards agreement, as it might have some ‘argument’ or ‘dispute’. She felt an important aspect of this was children’s ability to relate their own experience to that of others. Stating that ‘talking is strongly related to thinking’, she added that it was vital for children to ‘think and question for themselves’ through talk.
6.3.5 Francesca’s critique of her promotion of dialogic talk and concerns about it

In discussion, Francesca referred to her use of hot seating in the teaching episode as an attempt to drive towards dialogic talk. She believed that her lack of clarity had prevented the children from thinking and questioning for themselves. Although the level of vocabulary and discussion in response to her questions was good, she realised that the children did not understand what it means to be able to ask open questions. In discussing the issues that had faced her when trying to implement dialogic talk she named 5 broad areas:

- difficulty of definition;
- perceived views of others;
- lack of time/TP constraints;
- lack of training;
- need to work with a role-model.

First and foremost was her concern that it was difficult to define, so promotion was difficult. Despite having decided to write her second Masters level assignment on dialogic talk, she stated ‘I don’t feel very knowledgeable about it, but I know what I want from it’. This was linked to her fear that others, in particular the Head, might not recognize dialogic talk, and question the extent to which the children were learning:

> Your head teacher walks past your room every day of the week and if all your children are happily engaged in dialogue, what’s your job? What are you doing? Is it clear that you are doing your job?

Although she mentioned time as ‘a major barrier’, the key factor appeared not to be time per se, but ‘juggling’ the demands of Teaching Practice with meeting learning objectives:

> You need to hit a learning objective. If you allow the children to ‘just talk’, and I hate saying ‘just talk’; I really think it’s so valuable, but if you allow them to talk it can go in any direction and we have learning objectives, and we have to meet them, don’t we.
Francesca expressed a wish for more training in order to understand how to structure questions, and more particularly ‘how to respond to children’s questions without giving them the answer’. She clarified this further, explaining that she would find it most helpful to team-teach with someone who uses dialogic talk as part of his or her pedagogic repertoire. As she saw herself as someone who was not good at ‘turning knowledge into action’, this ‘modelling’ would help her to learn collaboratively by watching, then offer support in putting the principles into practice.

6.3.6 Analysis of Francesca’s commentary

Francesca’s discussion, and her lesson observations, showed that she was a risk-taker; she always sought to use drama, or to work with the children beyond the classroom, in order to expand their imagination, help them to make connections and encourage thinking. Despite this, she became increasingly nervous about working with dialogic talk without the support of a more experienced ‘other’ to act as a mentor and guide. Raphael et al’s (1992) work on teacher modelling of multiple discourse strategies showed this to be significant in promoting higher levels of understanding, and ability to engage in cognitively challenging discussion. Although this work was conducted with children, in essence, it represents the nature of the support needed by Francesca. The strength of her personal beliefs had, at that stage, prevented her from defaulting to observed practice; as both Poulson et al. (2001), and Fisher (2004), suggest, these beliefs determine how far individuals are prepared to accept advice or support or accept new pedagogies. Without support, it is possible that she would fail to persevere with what Moore (2004) deems a negotiated professional identity.
6.4. Case study 6: Dave

Pen-portrait
Dave was 27. He had a non-traditional entry into HE, having left school at 16 to take up an apprenticeship in industry. Following this, he took A levels, then a gap year, and then went on to study for a degree in Design and Technology in his mid twenties. He then went on to work for two years as a TA, one of these in a Primary outreach programme.

Initial written reflection on talk
In his initial reflection on talk, Dave had clear memories of group work and opportunities to discuss thinking processes during the tasks set. He was able to appreciate how much planning this must have taken to ensure productive collaboration and involvement, but related this to being 'at the higher end of our social development'. This rather pragmatic response focussed more on the social than cognitive aspect of talk.

Follow up interview
In the interview, Dave reflected on links between his own primary experiences, his work as a TA, and a teaching session in university, in which we explored the difference between discussion and dialogue. He was keen to discuss his current levels of understanding about talk, and made superficial reference to an interesting English project when he was a Y5 pupil, again stressing content rather than underpinning thinking, or learning, through dialogue.

His current belief was 'there is a difference between making valid points and trying to take over the discussion. I try to avoid that'. He said he found it easy to understand the theoretical nature of sessions because 'I can often recognise situations. That makes it easier to take what you say and put it into practice'. It was not possible to say that Dave was referring to all aspects of social constructivist principles, as the social and communicative aspects, rather than cognitive ones, appeared to hold significance for him.
6.4.1 First encounters with VSRD

During his first placement, Dave videoed a 15-minute session of guided reading with a group of able Y6 readers. Again, he discussed this with me in practical, rather than cognitive, terms, noting that, based on a word count during a representational 5-minute segment of talk, he did not dominate the discussion. The video showed that all the children had an opportunity to answer his questions, although they did not raise any themselves. The level of book-talk was good, and he managed the session well, although it is debatable how far this might be regarded as a dialogic episode.

6.4.2 Contextual information drawn from field-notes

Dave’s episode of VSRD took place half way through his final teaching practice; this was in an urban primary school in socio-economically disadvantaged dockside location. On the day I visited the school, Dave’s class teacher told me that the staff could take lessons from him on how to use questions. He undertook a guided reading session with 4 able Y6 readers (National Curriculum Level 5+) in a small teaching space, introducing a new book (The Wreck of the Zanzibar). Opening by asking children to look at the cover and read the blurb, he elicited voluntary contributions about plot and characters, following with a probe: ‘anything you’d like to add?’ Although he began by nominating, the children chipped in freely without waiting to be nominated, although they raised their hands at the same time.

One child offered a contribution then, after peer interjections, continued, ‘also…’ as if there had been no interruption, or that it had been irrelevant. The children did not build on each other’s answers, but did refer to text to support their views. This was a fairly closed discussion; although he was ostensibly asking for their views, he was driving towards his objectives.

Dave asked a closed question ‘What has Laura done?’ followed by an open ‘Do you think she’s happy?’ and at this point those fluent and highly able readers took it in turns to read aloud! The children made frequent links to other books by Morpurgo, particularly Kensuke’s Kingdom, picking up very small clues of names and places, speculating about
links and drawing on their own knowledge of WW2. One child made no voluntary contributions and was always nominated. Dave was keen to redirect towards his objective again – although the children’s discussion was actually at a deeper level than his questions. Several times, he did this by summarizing “So she might be feeling happy/envious…” rather than asking the children to do so. When he asked about the relationship between 2 characters, a very high level discussion took place between a boy and girl who strongly disagreed. They also disagreed at a later point, again, offering extended opinions, using the text and own empathy, without becoming defensive or confrontational.

Only one group member raised a question when he thought he had spotted a mistake with the ship Robert E Lee referred to as ‘she’.

6.4.3 e-mail reflection

A week later, having watched the video, Dave’s reflection picked up on a number of improvements he felt he could have made to the session; these often referred to probing further (although he did not use this term), for example ‘although I asked them to make predictions, I didn’t ask why they made them. I could have asked what they used to come up with those ideas’. This was echoed in his feeling that, although his questions were open, he did not allow the children to expand on their views enough: ‘my responses were sometimes a bit dismissive’.

As in my field notes, he also felt that some of his questions were rather leading ‘I think I did this because I wanted to ensure the children were thinking the same way as me on certain points.’ He acknowledged that this meant he probably felt he had the right answers in his head, and, on reflection, it would have been better to ask questions that allowed them to make up their own mind.

Interestingly, he believed that ‘on occasion’ he encouraged the children to formulate their own questions, and that he would do this more, as it was ‘extremely successful’. In practice, as shown by the field notes, only one was asked.
Overall, Dave was very pleased with the session, which he believed showed the children were not afraid to disagree with each other, and were able to discuss the book at a high level.

6.4.4 VSRD in the final placement: Dave's understanding of dialogic talk and its pedagogical purpose

A week after Dave completed his written reflection, we met. He defined his understanding of dialogic talk as ‘a kind of discussion’ with a group in which, after suggesting a ‘starting ground’, or asking some questions, children would ‘work out the answers…and make their own judgments and impressions themselves through discussion’. The teacher’s role was to step in ‘when they have gone so far off-course to make new suggestions or ask different questions’.

6.4.5 Dave’s critique of his promotion of dialogic talk and concerns about it

In his interview, Dave, unlike the other participants, expressed no real concerns about using dialogic talk; he described himself as ‘at early stages but I feel confident doing it’. He did concede that he would like more guidance, and the opportunity to use it with a more diverse group of children. He felt he was well informed, with ‘definitely not a lack of information’, and that there were ‘definitely no conflicting demands’ for him in putting it into practice, although he would like to know more about it. Dave believed that, although the questions he asked really engaged the children, he could still improve on this. He would also like to use the approach with ‘less able children, not just the higher ability ones’.

Dave’s confidence was so high that he was keen to work with other teachers, not to learn from them, but to hold a staff meeting in which he could ‘explain dialogic talk and guided reading, and how they work together’. He would like to ‘influence other teachers’ who might not know what dialogic teaching is.
6.4.6 Analysis of Dave’s commentary

It was interesting to note Dave’s high level of self-confidence; clearly this was partly due to his class teacher’s support. As the literature review indicated, the role of the mentor is crucial in determining how far the trainee is able to develop a teaching identity (for example, Coleman, 1998; Hayes, 2000, Maynard, 2000), and in school, trainees need to engage and reciprocate strongly with their mentors to receive professional endorsement. Although he did ask some well thought-out questions, this was a very one-sided business. What is debatable is how far his teaching episodes could be termed dialogic. Both the video recording, and field notes, showed there was no specific opportunity for the children to pose their own questions and all answers were directed towards him. As his definition of dialogic talk indicated, the teacher’s job was still to ‘step in and ask different questions’ when the children went ‘off course’.

It may have been that at this stage of his practice, the teaching objective was still the most important driver. Opportunities to engage in a more equal dialogue were lost because he closed down talk in order to meet those objectives.
6.5 Case-study 7: Serena

Pen Portrait
Serena was 44 years old, and experienced in the classroom, having worked for 8 years as a TA, and 3 as a HLTA and member of her previous school’s management team. Her degree was completed over 3 years, day-release, and was in Education and Training. Her dissertation focused on questioning.

Initial written reflection on talk
In her initial reflection on talk in her primary years, she remembered the teacher standing at the front ‘delivering’ information. There was no collaborative work and English was ‘relatively’ stale and boring. She ended her primary years bottom of the class in English, with little confidence, and a fear of expressing her opinions. Her real love of English was, she felt, ‘Curtailed by the way the subject was put across in my primary years’. Serena e-mailed me several times to emphasise her interest and enthusiasm about being included in the research project.

Follow-up interview
In her follow-up interview, Serena stated emphatically that she was ‘passionate about the place of talk in the classroom’. She discussed her primary school experience in which writing had no connection with discussion. Although a very imaginative person, her experience of English had been workbooks, and ‘straight into writing’. This was not helpful as she needed to talk in order to work ideas through.

Recent experience as a TA indicated to her that talk was still being used in the same way – as a means of control, and to deliver information, adding, ‘Children sit and listen too much. It reminds me of myself’. Serena had decided to write her dissertation on questioning, to try to instigate a change in practice throughout her school. At this point, she was able to independently introduce social constructivist theory into the discussion, and make a passing reference to dialogic talk.
6.5.1 First encounters with VSRD

In her first placement, Serena recorded an episode of guided reading related and discussion with 6 Y5 and Y6 children. She found this a deeply painful experience, and could hardly manage to watch herself. Although she believed the children engaged well with the discussion, and she felt she had not dominated the exchange, she could not bring herself to complete a word count, or share the video with me. She felt that she was constrained by a learning objective, and thus not open to what the children were saying. I wondered if, at this point, she would withdraw from the project. She did not.

6.5.2 Contextual information drawn from field-notes

Serena’s VSRD episode took place half way through her final placement in a small rural primary school. A group of six Y1 children, all girls in the ‘middle ability band’, undertook guided reading in the school library. Serena began with a closed question: ‘Can you remember what you said and did last time [we did GR]?’ The children all contributed without speaking over each other, but only when nominated. The pace was slow, as much was made of contextualizing the text. This led one reader to state: ‘If we keep going back to the first page, we won’t never get to the last page!’ [sic]

Serena opened the next part with quasi-open question: ‘today we’re going to think about the words. Were there any which helped us get a picture of what’s going on?’

Three children made interesting contributions, whilst two did not speak at all. When a good, extended answer was offered, Serena did not interrupt, but probed when the speaker finished. Although she spoke less as the children took over, they did not interact with each other, or build on contributions, and directed all their responses to her. She did not step in to move the lesson forward, but allowed as many ‘turns’ as the children wanted to take. The enthusiastic reader commented again ‘I want to get reading!’

Several more quasi-open questions were posed, for example, ‘So, do you think this adds to the story? Is he doing it for this reason, perhaps?’ After answering, the children took it in turns to read round the group several times, fluently with expression, and with no
miscues. Unsurprisingly, given their relatively high reading ability, two children were not concentrating, but asking about turns. One particular child put her hand up each time a question was asked, but was not selected on any occasion, so remained silent. She was the least fluent & expressive reader. The enthusiastic reader chipped in again ‘I’ve lost track!‘

Although Serena asked ‘Why do you think the author wants me to pause?’ she did answer her own question after 5 unsuccessful attempts were made. The next question ‘Are there any good doing words?’ elicited two answers – ‘suddenly’ and ‘something’, but these misconceptions were not addressed.

Experience as an English teacher, tutor and supervisor all indicated that these Year 1 children remained on carpet too long. The 15-minute session designated for guided reading lasted 50 minutes! Although sitting opposite a clock, Serena appeared to have no awareness of time; this did not seem to be about pace, rather a lack of peripheral awareness. After the initial 20 minutes, during which time several individual, extended answers were offered, the children simply began to repeat what they had said previously, and no further learning was evident. Both the video, and the field notes, indicate that at this point, other than the child speaking, the others were no longer listening, but rolling around on the floor and asking when they could go to lunch. Although she was ‘passionate about the place of talk’, her concern not to deliver information allowed the children to direct the lesson in an unstructured way.

6.5.3 e-mail reflection

A week later, Serena managed to watch the video although she ‘did not look forward to viewing as I felt the session had not gone brilliantly’. Contrary to her expectations, she found it a positive experience, noting the children’s use of ‘productive talk’. She felt that she was modeling good active listening skills and that her ‘non-verbal language is very positive’ as she gave ‘lots of encouragement’, and did not interrupt them. She believed she showed good subject knowledge and that the children drew on, and applied, learning from other contexts.
As in my field notes, Serena stated ‘to some extent, it could be said that the children have led the session’, but made no comment about the lack of direction, length of the episode, or that the best learning had occurred in the first third of the session. She felt she had been ‘far more open to what the children were saying than in the last guided session I videoed’. She ended by speculating that it would be ‘good to get the children to challenge each other’s ideas’.

6.5.4 VSRD in the final placement: Serena’s understanding of dialogic talk and its pedagogical purpose

In her interview with me a week later, Serena defined her understanding of dialogic talk as an ‘open dialogue’ in which children could ‘run’ with a topic arising through talk. Indicators of dialogic talk were ‘1. Being able to reason. 2. Being able to validate your point of view. 3. Being able to formulate your ideas through discussion with others. 4. Taking on board others’ ideas and working with them. The purpose was to ‘encourage thinking’. Dialogic talk, she emphasized, ‘has no right or wrong answers’.

6.5.5 Serena’s critique of her promotion of dialogic talk and concerns about it

Serena acknowledged that, although the children had been encouraged to raise topics, and take as many ‘turns’ as they wanted, the talk had not been dialogic. She went on to express a number of concerns about promoting dialogic talk; these fell broadly into 5 categories:

- Stress/guilt/time constraints
- Subject knowledge
- The target and systems-driven culture
- Teacher expectation
- School ethos and approaches to pedagogic development

Although arguably the most knowledgeable (theoretically), and certainly the most experienced, participant, Serena expressed the most concerns about promoting dialogic
talk. She acknowledged that although she was tempted to say she knew nothing about it, she realized that she had ‘picked up quite a bit’ and was on the ‘second rung of the ladder’. Early in the interview she made a strong statement:

*Teaching dialogically is not easy when we are bound by stress, particularly the feelings of guilt which accompany time constraints (pace), paperwork and targets.*

Although she went on to list other factors, most of these appeared to relate back to the feeling of stress. Subject knowledge, she felt, was unlikely to reach a good enough level to promote confidence in working with ideas through dialogic teaching, for at least three years ‘I don’t care what anybody says, it isn’t there when you start teaching’.

Serena was particularly vocal about the constraints which she perceived are currently placed on teachers. ‘There is a battle going on’, she stated. Hard working teachers were attempting to juggle unreasonable expectations, targets, objectives-led teaching, SATs, Ofsted and an overcrowded curriculum (she used the word ‘cram’) which militated against ‘a willingness to try more exploratory-type education’. This is where Serena felt opportunities to use dialogic teaching were lost. She cited a ‘very masculinised, system-driven environment that quashes opportunities for creativity and dialogic teaching’ as a particular barrier, and returned to the notion of objectives-led teaching as an inhibitor several times.

It appeared that she believed teachers’ expectations of what children are actually capable of, in relation to talk, were not high enough: not merely in mainstream schools. This she attributed partly to the lack of emphasis on talk in the original Primary Strategy. She went on to discuss the elements she believed necessary to develop dialogic teaching, arguing that these were in place in her second teaching practice in a Special School, where dialogic talk ‘could be huge’:

*The atmosphere, the ethos, was all to get the children talking. Although you had stuff you had to teach, it was about going with the children’s needs – personalized learning - not sure how that fits with the accountability agenda, but it was less of a barrier in the Special School.*
She was emphatic about the key role of the head in creating an ethos of learning. This should include whole school training, and pedagogic approaches being ‘ingrained across the school’ if innovations were to be successful. Serena stated ‘I’ve got everything in place but I can’t develop it on my own. I’d like to discuss it with other people who understand it and use it’. She expressed a wish to understand how to help children take the next step, and to go on training for Philosophy for Children, as she could see them working well together.

6.5.6 Analysis of Serena’s commentary

As briefly indicated above, despite being a very experienced classroom practitioner, and more theoretically informed than any of the other case study participants, Serena had the least confidence in her teaching, and promotion of dialogic talk. Much of her discussion related to curriculum and policy constraints, and the resulting stress level, rather than about dialogic talk. Hollyforde and Whiddett’s (2002) work on motivation and self-actualisation suggests that development of teaching identity is driven by a perception of a positive outcome and personal value. Where the current literacy curriculum (Bryan, 2004) presents English as a package of basic skills, and teacher professionalism as a commodity to be ‘earned’ through following policy documentation, this may present pedagogical and philosophical dilemmas for trainees with a strong sense of what ‘should’ be done, as opposed to what ‘must’ be done.
6.6 Case study 8: Demelza

Pen-portrait
Demelza was 26 and had a Masters degree in English Literature. She had worked as a PA, and a theatre manager, but her only teaching experience had been 3 months in West Africa during her gap year.

Initial written reflection on talk
In her initial reflection on talk in her own primary education, Demelza stated that she felt lucky in the teaching she received, after comparing experiences with other students. Although she stated that exploratory talk was not really used until Y6, two of her teachers had worked well together, with their style encouraging debate. Year 5, she remembered, was the most limited, with textbook teaching and ‘hands up’, ‘depending on the teacher’s mood’. The school itself had a ‘have a go’ ethos, and ground rules of being supportive of others’ views.

Follow-up interview
In her follow up interview, Demelza confirmed that her prior experience of talk had been entirely positive ‘I had no problem putting my hand up, or asking questions, and I’m really confident with that now. I like to contribute, and they encouraged that at school’. Tammy believed that ground rules help children to understand the parameters of talk, and how to listen well and value others’ views, adding ‘children need to be able to talk about what interests them, not just what the teacher wants to be discussed’. She noted the strategies she has seen me using in taught sessions:

You encourage us to join in but in quite a subtle way really, and you do say what you think, but you get us to give our opinions. You can tell if someone’s really interested in what you say.

Demelza added that it is difficult to join in if someone is dominant, or if the trust, or ethos, is not there. For a dialogue worthy of the name, there needed to be interest, engagement and a willingness to listen with an open mind.
6.6.1 First encounters with VSRD
In her first placement, Demelza had a positive, and instructive, first experience of using VSRD. She videoed a 20 minute episode of guided reading, and, on watching it, was confident that she asked open questions; encouraged participation, and probed answers. Conducting the word count over 5 minutes, however, told a different story: she realised she was speaking at least twice as many words as the children. Close attention showed her that this was because she repeated everything the children said. ‘I was totally shocked’, she said, and related this to the fact that she may be uncomfortable with silences.

6.6.2 Contextual information drawn from field-notes
Demelza’s VSRD episode took place half way through her final teaching practice, in a very small rural primary school, in which there were 2 classes with 1 Key Stage per class. She conducted a guided reading session with three able Y5 readers in a quiet teaching space.

The children were familiar with the opening of the book (Kensuke’s Kingdom). Demelza began with an open question; all contributed and no hands were put up. Only when all had contributed did she speak, probing their answers. The children engaged in an unprompted discussion of question types, showing sophisticated understanding, for example: ‘This isn’t a rhetorical question, it’s literal, so you must want an answer’.

She went on to ask a quasi-open question: ‘How does the author make you think that there really is water, water everywhere?’ and probed all answers offered (‘is there anything else?’ and again, ‘anything else?’). Children frequently asked each other for a reference to page/paragraph as they cited evidence from text to support their opinion. 2 children drew on knowledge of the water cycle to extend their answers, building on each other’s response. All referred to personal experience to support answers.

Although Demelza asked direct questions, looking for evidence of evaluative comprehension, she rarely nominated children and confined herself to ‘Mmmm’ as they
answered. The children, although keen to answer, did not like to talk over each other or
interject. One girl was very eager to contribute but too polite to interrupt, and the moment
was lost. Demelza asked children to rehearse sophisticated strategies for tackling
unknown words, but did not play ‘Guess what’s in my head’, giving them thinking time to
work out vocabulary such as ‘conspiracy’. Where it was evident the word was new, they
were then told its meaning. She concluded with a closed question ‘How does the author
make you want to read on?’ (This assumed they did want to!). There was good teaching,
and use, of comprehension strategies, but none of metalanguage. There was evidence of
building on each other’s ideas, but no disagreement or interrupting.

6.6.3 e-mail reflection

A week later, Demelza’s reflection showed that although she was pleased not to have
dominated the discussion, there were many areas she felt required improvement. She
was the only participant to mention dialogic aspects, and linked this to the power balance
between teacher and children: ‘although they were likely to say yes, their positive reaction
to the chapter seemed to be genuine’. She also reflected on the nature of questions she
had asked, and a missed opportunity to extend thinking:

> I was interested to see how the literal question about what characters there
> were in the second chapter opened up some quite interesting discussions.
> When planning the session, I had seen that as quite a closed question, and
> although I had considered the boat to be a character, I hadn’t anticipated
> that the children would.

Similarly, she recognized that in asking the children what made them want to read on,
rather than if they wanted to do so, she had made the assumption that this was the case.
She also added that, had she understood the level of the children’s metalanguage
beforehand, she would have done some focused teaching to enable them to ‘really talk
about the author’s techniques’. She also wished to develop her ability to help children
understand texts by ‘using their own experiences and those of people they know’.
Overall, Demelza was pleased that she was now comfortable with thinking silences, and
able to interject less automatically.
6.6.4 VSRD in the final placement: Demelza's understanding of dialogic talk and its pedagogical purpose

In her interview a week later, Demelza conceptualised dialogic talk as essentially about ‘extending thinking, rather than just answering yes/no questions’. In order to do this, it was essential to encourage children to ‘go beyond the most basic, and start using talk to develop thinking’. She thought of this type of talk as having a ‘sliding scale’ with ‘basic discussion’ at one end, gradually becoming ‘more extended’. The teacher could pose questions to ‘get discussion going’; however, as this was a ‘way of learning’, it was important to ensure all were ‘participating, and contributing, and moving the knowledge; using other’s ideas to spark a new thought’.

6.6.5 Demelza’s critique of her promotion of dialogic talk and concerns about it

In her interview, Demelza felt that she had been working towards using dialogic talk, and that there were elements in place (such as encouraging the children to express their own views, and probing their responses). She did not believe she had managed to capitalise on this, however, indicating that she could have opened dialogue further, chained responses, or transferred more responsibility to the children. She listed three concerns about promoting dialogic talk:

- Time constraints
- School environment
- Practitioner understanding of the term

Through discussion, it appeared that time constraints were less about an overcrowded curriculum, and more about the need to avoid the temptation to rush as ‘dialogic talk takes time to develop’. This, she felt, could be problematic when there are other calls on one’s time on TP. This was linked to the school environment, which needed to be right, and encouraging, or it was difficult to take the risk and try something as different as dialogic teaching. A dilemma, she perceived, was getting people to look beyond the label and engage conceptually with the underpinning theory:
There’s a definite challenge about people understanding why it’s not just a fancy word or a new idea, or theory that will go out of use. I think that’s a barrier, which is why, having spoken to people about it, it’s “what’s that?” then move on. They don’t really engage with it. It’s just a label.

She had been reflecting on pedagogic strategies, and looking out for dialogic teaching in others’ practice, believing she had seen it ‘slightly’ in her second placement. Although she said she had not encountered the term before beginning her PGCE English course, Demelza felt that if her knowledge was ‘at naught before’, she was now at ‘six or seven’; as her ideas had grown, she became confident enough to talk to a student from another university about it. She was still concerned that there was a gap ‘between my skills in doing it in comparison to what I believe and everything I’ve read about it’, but was eager to improve her use of questioning, and use of ‘critical moments’ to move talking and thinking forward. She was excited that she would begin a job in September in a school, which had just moved to using dialogic teaching, enabling her to work with other teachers to develop it.

6.6.6 Analysis of Demelza's commentary

Demelza, of all the participants in Cycle 3, had engaged the most with the theoretical underpinning of dialogic talk. Possibly because it resonated with her political beliefs, she had seen it as ‘more than a label’, and a means of promoting cognitively stimulating discussion, beyond a recitation script. Her highly developed ‘discourse knowledge’ (Alexander et al., 1991), that is, awareness of her audience and how to express concepts appropriately, enabled her to construct ‘backchannel moves’ (Dillon, 1994) such as gesture, verbal signal and pause. Each ‘signal’ allowed the children to hold or take back their turns and continue expressing a view, and indicated genuine interest in what they had to say. Nevertheless, although supremely professional in her discussion of issues, lack of knowledge in the school, and a tendency to ‘label’ pedagogic approaches, rather than question them, had led to a feeling that she was working alone. Stevens et al (2006) argue that the best teaching occurs when trainees see themselves as learners, and, as Moore (2004) suggests, those who are willing to challenge their assumptions are often aware of the need to negotiate a professional identity. Demelza appeared to be constructing her identity comfortably within the ‘dialogic space’ Moore (ibid) suggests
exists between pre-existing values, the advice of others, practical circumstances and the constraints of policy and practice.
6.7 Case study 9: Elizabeth

Pen-portrait
Elizabeth was 30. She had a Masters degree in geology, and a law degree, and had worked for some years in family law. Her only classroom experience was a term's voluntary work in Y3.

Initial written reflection on talk
In her initial reflection, Elizabeth talked about two separate experiences. Initially in a small island school, she remembered the teacher as a figure of ‘ultimate authority’, and talk as entirely teacher-led and controlled. From entry to school, she was labelled as ‘less able’ and her parents eventually moved to the mainland, sending Elizabeth to a private school to avoid the label. In the second school, she remembered being one of a small number of girls in a male classroom; she felt ‘special, important but also intimidated’, and therefore did not contribute to such discussion as was conducted.

Follow-up interview
In her interview, Elizabeth discussed her experience of talk at the island school. She was made aware that she was not as clever as her brother, and that she was not expected to express an opinion. At her mainland school, she felt able to participate in ‘conversation in subjects where I had more confidence’, although she did not do so often. Elizabeth stated that the work we were doing in English sessions in university exploring the value of talk was ‘all new’ to her, and had ‘opened her eyes’ to possibilities for learning. She was able to refer to social constructivist principles, and the importance of dialogue for learning.

6.7.1 First encounters with VSRD
Elizabeth videoed a 15-minute episode of guided reading during her first placement. Following this, she e-mailed me to explain that it was possibly the worst example of teaching that she had ever seen, although she conceded that the opening sequence was ‘not too bad’. It was clear that the children were keen to discuss the text, but as the session was talking place in the staffroom, Elizabeth was concerned that she was having
difficulty with behaviour. When a number of members of staff walked in and out during the sequence, she began to focus solely on behaviour management. The talk was not dialogic, although it showed the children had a good understanding of the text; this is interesting since she told me this was the first time the children had ever done guided reading.

6.7.2 Contextual information drawn from field-notes

Elizabeth’s episode of VSRD took place half way through her final teaching practice in a large primary school in an advantaged socio-economic area on the edge of a city. Following practice for sports day, and afternoon playtime, she conducted an impromptu guided reading session in an empty classroom with 5 children from Y5. This was the first afternoon session I had been invited to. The children were selected for their interest and ability to discuss text rather than National Curriculum reading level.

There was no planning for this session and I had the distinct feeling that, as the school did not ‘do’ guided reading (or dialogic talk), this was a one-off session whereby the school was humouring me for their student’s sake. The field notes indicate that I was left in an empty classroom for 45 minutes, then, when Elizabeth was released from her task of supervising children at a sports day practice, we were allocated another empty room with the proviso that it would soon be needed. Elizabeth decided on the spur of the moment to ask the children to reread the first pages of ‘Stig of the Dump’ (they had read this as a class novel). There was no stated objective, and she opened with, “What do you think about the opening of the story, bearing in mind what we have been working on in class?” The children put up their hands, whereupon she interjected, “I know I usually ask you to put up your hands, but for the purposes of this, can you just…talk?”

The discussion opened immediately with one child expressing an opinion about the text, and the others all volunteering contributions. They were polite, and hesitant about speaking when another was speaking, but managed the whole session confidently with some overlapping. Each speaker gave way to the interjector, and, if challenged, all speakers conceded the point made by the challenger. They were not secure with different
points of view, and appeared to want to drive to ‘common agreement’ building on each other’s responses.

Elizabeth confined herself to “mmm”, rather than interjecting. Without any prompting, the children’s answers were always expanded, supported with reference to the text and, often, reference to personal experience. Some answers were probed (‘and why do you think that?’), but for the most part, the children gave expanded answers, and peers intervened to express their opinion (in support).

In fact, Elizabeth hardly spoke at all, beyond asking three or four questions, acting more as a facilitator than a teacher. As a discussion of views, this was very good, but as an opportunity for learning, I am not sure the children progressed at all. This format was clearly not a usual part of practice, as Elizabeth confirmed, but children coped very well. It would be interesting to see how this could be developed with children justifying their opinion more robustly in the face of challenge.

6.7.3 e-mail reflection

A week later, having watched the video, Elizabeth sent a brief, enthusiastic e-mail. Her response was, however, very pragmatic and did not relate overly to dialogue, or learning. ‘The group were absolutely brilliant’, she commented, noting their insight and ability to talk about the text. She had clearly conflated dialogic talk, and guided reading, and was ‘impressed (and shocked) that they related it to the work we had done in class to improve our openings’.

Elizabeth said she had wanted just to let the children talk and not ‘interrupt their flow’, although she had ensured everyone ‘had a chance to contribute’. Her point for development, should she take this kind of session again, was that she would ensure ‘a tighter ending as I was not sure how to conclude the session’.
6.7.4 VSRD in the final placement: Elizabeth’s understanding of dialogic talk and its pedagogical purpose

Elizabeth’s interview a week later showed that she did not feel secure about the concept of dialogic talk. However, despite stating at regular intervals that she was not at all sure what it was, she suggested that it was a way of ‘getting more out of your students by the way you talk to them in the form of questions, comments, exclamations or noises, like mmm’. She went on to state that it was about getting children to ‘open up’ and to engage in ‘meaningful conversation, either peer-peer, or peer-teacher’, and that it should not be done in an ‘old fashioned way where the teacher does most of the talking’. She saw its purpose as threefold: ‘to ascertain understanding; definitely to exchange information; to ensure transformation of thinking’.

6.7.5 Elizabeth’s critique of her promotion of dialogic talk and concerns about it

Elizabeth did not feel able to critique her promotion of dialogic talk in the interview, but listed three concerns relating to its promotion:

Uncertainty about the concept
Time and curricular constraints
Behaviour management

At several points during the interview, she reiterated that she was not sure what dialogic talk was, appearing to think a dictionary definition was required. She explained that a number of teachers she had spoken to had also confirmed that they had never heard of it. She had only ‘seen’ it in her PGCE course:

*I’m not picking it up from observing other people, or from notes when you get observed and people say “it might have been a good idea here if you’d done this”.*

Time, and curricular, constraints were also highlighted. Elizabeth talked of the pressures of SATs, and schools being ‘big on pupil progress’ and ‘pushing down on you saying you have to move them up two sub-levels over the academic year’. This, she felt is what causes ‘fun’ things like talking to ‘fall by the wayside’. The third concern was behaviour management; planning for classroom talk means that ‘chaos is going to ensue’,
especially if the TA was not present. Using dialogic talk seemed risky when faced with ‘the reality of teaching’.

6.7.6 Analysis of Elizabeth’s commentary

It was interesting to learn, through the interview, that Elizabeth viewed talk as a ‘fun thing’, which could be removed from the curriculum in order to allow teachers, and children, to get on with the real business of learning. This suggests that she had not made the connection between talk, and cognition, despite my perception that this was the central theme of the postgraduate English course. Although her reference to the appropriate use of noises such as “mmm”, might be construed to relate to Dillon’s (1994) back channel moves, in practice the video showed this to be an awkward device: almost the non-verbal equivalent of an inauthentic question.

The school, with its reputation as ‘outstanding’, both in terms of inspection and public perception, appeared to have caused Elizabeth to develop a ‘critical schizophrenia’ by neither promoting talk for learning, nor guided reading: two approaches to developing critical comprehension in which trainees had a thorough grounding. In the literature review chapter, attention is drawn to the work of Spendlove et al. (2006,p.2), which suggests that mentors may be preoccupied with ‘fast tracking’ trainees to the pragmatics of school rather than making pedagogic practice explicit. Elizabeth’s comments on the ‘realities of teaching’ appeared to relate to this.
6.8 Reflection on Cycle 3

The data obtained from both the questionnaire, and the case study participants, provided a rich and detailed picture of the values, beliefs and experiences of a whole cohort of trainees. The overwhelming evidence suggested that these 75 prospective teachers, irrespective of age or gender, appeared to have had limited opportunities to engage in talk for learning themselves, and that they perceived their own teachers’ talk roles as principally related to behaviour management and information imparting.

The decision to contextualise the experiences of the case study participants through classroom observation added another dimension to this; it allowed an insight into what it means to struggle with the business of developing teaching identity, and managing pedagogical innovation. This ‘being there’ highlighted a number of factors which impacted on the students’ ability to promote dialogic talk. These will be discussed fully in the following chapter, but some initial thoughts are explored here.

At the start of Cycle 3, the postgraduate English course was readjusted to make more explicit the principles of dialogic talk, and to contextualise Alexander’s (2005) framework through pedagogic approaches modelled in taught sessions. Despite this, it was clear that even the case study trainees struggled with conceptual understanding. What became evident through the research process was that all 5 were attempting to move beyond their ‘confusion’, with varying degrees of success. However, although it cannot be argued with any certainty, it appeared that without expert mentoring, some, if not all, would give up the struggle. As indicated in the literature review (for example, Argyris & Schon, 1974; Young, 1992), a great deal has been written about the tendency of ITT trainees to default to observed practice, and not to question the relationship between teachers’ ‘espoused theories’ and ‘theories in use’. Some of the case study students had discussed dialogic talk with their mentors, and appeared to gain comfort from the fact that they were not alone in their lack of knowledge.

Without a pedagogical understanding of what dialogic talk might look like, and professional endorsement of practice, it seems unlikely that students such as Serena and
Elizabeth will incorporate this into their teaching repertoire. Further, the confidence of students such as Dave, and praise of his mentor, may lead him to a level of complacency in his ability to ask questions: cumulative, reciprocal and critical dialogue may never be fully developed in his classroom. For Francesca, the risk-taker, much appeared to depend on the chance of her finding a practitioner on which to model herself. Only Demelza, who had secured an appointment as an NQT in a school which had recently taken on a ‘dialogic’ approach to teaching, appeared ready and able to challenge the vagueness of ‘interactive’ teaching and the confines of a recitation script.
Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction: Drawing the threads together

This chapter considers the results presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 which detail the ways in which student teachers conceptualised their talk-roles, and how they enacted this in their classrooms, as they simultaneously engaged with the process of developing a teaching identity and grappled with the curriculum innovation of dialogic talk. Drawing on the literature review in Chapter 2, and findings outlined in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the following five main questions provide the framework for this discussion:

1. What are the factors which influence student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk in their primary classrooms?
2. How do students perceive the pedagogical and conceptual construct of dialogic talk?
3. How do trainees implement dialogic talk in the classroom?
4. What experiences influence their implementation?
5. What attitudes influence their implementation?

However, in drawing together the threads of the research to present the key ideas which have emerged, it became apparent that the questions taken from Barnes’ (1976) work on patterns of classroom communication, which closed Chapter 2, remain as significant 35 years later:

- Who has decided that patterns of talk are as they are?
- How do these patterns change?
- How do children & teachers learn them?
- How does this actually contribute to learning?

In examining the five main questions, this chapter will contend that they are inextricably tied to those of Barnes. Using the research data on dialogic talk, it will suggest that patterns of classroom interaction have proved remarkably resistant to change for a number of reasons, and that they may continue to be resistant, if the factors which
impacted, positively and negatively, on the student teachers’ ability to develop different
talk patterns are not addressed in policy or practice.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the students’ conceptual and pedagogical
perceptions of dialogic talk; this is foregrounded to contextualise the following sections
which offer a number of contentions regarding the fate of this particular curriculum
innovation. The first point made by the discussion is that insufficient attention has been
paid to the experiences of talk that student teachers have had in their own primary
education, the impact that has on their own construct of ‘self-as-teacher’, and the talk
roles they are likely to adopt in the classroom. Where there is a lack of consideration of
prior experience, and a shortage of time to explore these deeply ingrained attitudes,
defaulting to observed practice is, perhaps, more likely. If this is allied with decades of
top-down curriculum change, with insufficient theoretical underpinning, student teachers
may enter classrooms where espoused and enacted practice are different, and there is
little opportunity for reflection by all parties on ‘beyond the surface’ features of pedagogy.
Secondly, it suggests that concepts such as ‘interthinking’, ‘building new understandings’
and ‘developing common knowledge’ have been accommodated into existing modes of
practice in much the same fashion as ‘interactive teaching’: a ‘good thing’ which ‘we do
any way’, without its underpinning theoretical constructs being subjected to inspection
and challenge. It also suggests that there has been a conflation of ‘building common
knowledge’ and ‘seeking agreement’. Thirdly, it posits that there is a culturally
constructed notion of democracy and turn-taking which, when linked with the notion of
pace, privileges contribution over challenge. Fourthly, it speculates about the lack of
probing and uptake questions posed by teachers, suggesting that this might be linked to
an inability to manipulate the IRF discussion format to hand control of feedback moves to
children, or to a lack of understanding that the answer is the fulcrum of the learning
exchange, rather than the question. It further suggests that lack of subject knowledge,
often seen as unconnected with the ‘real world’ of the classroom, can inhibit the posing of
‘genuine questions’. It concludes by suggesting that patterns of talk will remain broadly
the same, unless theory is more closely linked to practice and practice to theory (Milner,
2005), citing a complete lack of information for teachers as the major factor inhibiting
student teachers’ promotion of dialogic talk.
7.2 Scratching the surface and digging deeper: deep and surface understanding of dialogic talk

This section begins by examining the case study students’ pedagogical and conceptual perceptions and understanding of dialogic talk as articulated in the interviews, observations and reflective dialogue with myself as their research partner. It presents a ‘typology’ drawn from the data and endeavours to differentiate between deep and surface features; the latter characterized by observable features of practice, and the former relating to cognitive, affective and social processes which, although stimulated by visible practice, are less susceptible to observation or assessment. It also examines the pedagogic rationale the students applied to its use in the observed lessons.

The literature review indicated that the lack of theoretical guidance in the NLS (DfEE, 1998a) lead to a perception that even experienced teachers were not sufficiently informed about the underpinning of interactive teaching to engage beyond surface levels. Since there was no guidance at all on dialogic teaching in the revised framework for teaching literacy (DfES, 2006), each of the students, none of whom had prior experience of interactive or dialogic teaching, was drawing upon a relatively small bank of theoretical and practical knowledge. Their understanding was gleaned from English sessions at university, a briefing paper drawn from the work of Alexander (2005, 2008) and an article by Skidmore (2000) on pedagogy and dialogue. Their engagement with it in the classroom was driven solely by their interest, and contact with me, as none of the teachers in any of the schools claimed to have heard of dialogic talk, despite basing their teaching programmes on the literacy strategy. Moyles et al. (2003) in their study of interactive teaching are insistent that lack of clarity (on the part of the DfES) is not a “theoretical inconvenience” (p. 19) but something far more serious; their words are worth reproducing here, since they apply equally to dialogic teaching:

As professionals, teachers need to understand what the concept means…it is pointless unless we understand why we are asking them to do it, when it is appropriate and what sorts of information it can and cannot lead to. (p.19)

Given the constraints discussed above, the following table presents the features attributed to dialogic teaching by the case study students.
### Surface features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exchanging information</th>
<th>Constructs referring to conveying new knowledge or assessing children’s understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active involvement</td>
<td>Constructs emphasizing active participation in conversation; the teacher providing ‘starting points’ and ‘stepping in’ as necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad pupil participation</td>
<td>Constructs that stress the importance of all participating and building on each other’s ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using talk strategies</td>
<td>Constructs relating to teaching strategies such as back channel moves to avoid dominating the talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Deep features

| Developing thinking | Constructs noting the link between talk and thinking and the development of ‘reasoning’, formulating ideas and the transformation of thinking. |
| Reciprocity and meaning-making | Constructs referring to the importance of two-way communication and altering horizons of meaning through argument, testing and validating ideas, and having no right or wrong answers |
| Activating/using prior knowledge | Constructs recognizing the importance of personal experience in understanding others’ views. |

**Fig. 19: deep and surface features of dialogic talk**

As Chapters 4, 5, and 6 detailed, the discussions showed that even though the students placed equal focus upon surface and deep features, six of the nine were able to discuss seemingly surface features in a sophisticated way, linking them to deeper features. For example, broad pupil participation was linked to the ability to construct new understandings; active involvement to developing thinking through careful listening and then, careful speaking. What was entirely absent from the interview data was any notion that rather than the questions being paramount, it was what was done with the answers that held the key to learning. Similarly, only one student, Francesca, suggested that the talk might contain argument or disagreement, or that children themselves should be empowered to ask questions. All were certain, however, that dialogic talk, which they appeared to place at the higher end of a spectrum of discussion, and diametrically opposed to didactic teaching, had the capacity to develop children’s thinking skills. This was justified by a broad reference in many cases to Social Constructivist principles, and to Vygotsky in particular.

The pedagogic purpose for using dialogic talk was less well defined, as Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explained. As the following table indicates, the students were often more focused
on their own teaching than the children’s learning. Using dialogic talk was seen as a quick means of assessment and an opportunity to hone questioning skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogic purpose</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To develop talk about text</td>
<td>Contextualized as ‘exploring text’; teaching how to focus on emotion; understand writers’ techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To encourage children to question each other</td>
<td>Contextualised as ‘getting children to think &amp; question for themselves’; ‘question each other &amp; build on their ideas’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To assess</td>
<td>Contextualised as ‘getting a deeper understanding of the child’ (rather than of their learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To ask good questions</td>
<td>Contextualised as ‘developing my questioning techniques’; ‘asking open questions’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 20: Pedagogical purpose of DT**

Although the participants had a limited amount of reflection time with a research partner, this was far greater than the normal pattern for ITT students; as Bullough and Gitlin (1991) argue, there are all too few opportunities for teachers to articulate in depth the constructs which underpin their practice. To refer briefly to the answers returned by the whole group at the end of Cycle 2, discussed in Chapter 5, the majority had no conceptual or pedagogical understanding of dialogic talk at all following their final teaching practice. It can be argued, therefore, that the level of conceptual and pedagogical thinking evident in the case study students was entirely the consequence of being able to engage in dialogue with a ‘more experienced’ other, at a distance from the site of practice, without any fear of ‘failing’. It is doubtful that a relationship of this nature could have been established with the supervising tutor, and begs the question of how this could be replicated, if it is seen as an aid to changing established modes of practice.

It is appropriate here to turn to the literature on deep and surface learning in order to question if there is a possible connection between deep learning and the ability to articulate a conceptual and pedagogic understanding of dialogic talk, and to speculate on its place in developing learning. According to Campbell et al.’s (2001, p.177) study of the learning habits of teenage pupils, those who have a preference for deep approaches to learning are more likely to comprehend the cognitive potential of constructivist teaching strategies, and to have a more sophisticated understanding of the teaching and learning opportunities which are available to them. As Biggs (1993, pp. 75–76) and Evans et al. (2003, p.511) suggest, a critical component of deep learning is “the willingness to engage
in effortful cognitive activities”. Surface learners will tend towards a more transmissive mode of teaching and reproductive aspects of learning: avoiding failure, whilst expending minimum effort, rather than learning. Leung (2003) argues a strong relationship between approaches to learning and reflective thinking, and this appears significant in the context of applying relatively abstract concepts (dialogic teaching) in different environments. Without an association with personal meaning, ‘understanding’ cannot be complete: without reflection, there can be little chance of successful application and perspective transformation. Both deep and surface learners go on to become teachers; the former may bring with them the ability to construct a supportive learning environment (Noddings, 1993), the latter, ones in which strongly teacher focused modes of operation, routine transmission, practise and reproduction of knowledge are the norm. This is not to say that deep learners are more likely to be able to promote dialogic teaching, but they may be more willing to grapple with its complexities.

The chapter continues with a discussion of the issues indicated in 7.1 above, and provides a more detailed reflection on the inhibiting factors identified in the data.

### 7.3 Constructing a teaching identity

This section suggests that students’ approach to talk is, arguably, shaped unconsciously by their own primary experiences, rather than entirely by defaulting to observed practice. In analyzing this, it examines three factors: the development of a teaching identity; prior experience (although the two are related); and a mandated ITT curriculum.

Although many of the research participants wrote of negative experiences, and of interactions controlled and dominated by the teachers’ voice, and expressed a sense of ‘injustice’ that their voices were not heard, they still viewed their principal role as an information giver. It seemed that, without positive role models in school, it was difficult to escape falling into an instructional mode, and ‘policing’ behaviour. Constructing a teaching identity is a complex process, and Mellinee et al. (2004) offer a useful framework through which to examine the research literature on learning to teach, suggesting it is grouped into three broad categories. The first one concerns itself with
comparing the beliefs of teachers at different stages in their careers (e.g. Hargreaves, 2004). The second examines the influence of university courses on pre-existing beliefs (e.g. Moore 2004). The third examines the changes to student teachers’ knowledge and beliefs that arise:

...from tensions between university training and ecological factors such as school politics (Kelchertman & Ballet, 2002), the school-university collaboration (Lenski, et. al., 2001), or the degree of “match” between student teachers and cooperating teachers. (p.2)

It is beyond the scope of this research to consider in any depth the first of those categories, qualified teachers’ developmental beliefs. It is freely acknowledged, however, that the positioning of school-based mentors, and their professional/pedagogical understandings, do impact upon the student teachers’ experiences, and this proved to be the case, positively, for case study students Demelza and Dave, and negatively for Susie and Elizabeth. The literature review suggests that a number of theorists (see for example, Smith, 2005; Maynard, 2000; Hayes, 2000; Campbell & Kane, 1998; Calderhead & Shorrocks, 1997; Stephenson, 1995; Hutchinson, 1994; Hollingsworth, 1993; Kagan, 1992; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Whitty & Willmott, 1991) are clear that the development of a teaching identity is the primary concern of student teachers; this may be seen as inextricably linked with their prior experience, both educational and social, and as such, the two work together. They have been separated here, however, to tease out two of the key issues arising from the research: first, the tension between prior experience of talk as primary pupils themselves, pre-existing beliefs and values, and the talk role they are expected to fulfill in the classroom; secondly, the tensions which exist between university teaching and the ‘realities’ of the classroom.

7.3.1 Examining prior experience

In any discussion of learning, frequent mention is made of activating children’s prior knowledge; drawing on what the learner already knows, and, in terms of critical literacy, understanding the ‘prior learning’ is not limited to ‘what we did in class last week’ (Pressley et al., 1992). In attempting to understand what it is that student teachers bring to the Initial Teacher Training course, and into the classroom, and how far that shapes
the approaches they feel able to use in promoting more open and reciprocal dialogue, probing their prior experience seems key.

The data obtained form the larger samples, and from the case study students, showed that many had overwhelmingly negative memories of their talk roles in the primary classroom. They had begun their course with a background shaped by talk conducted and dominated by authoritarian figures. Teachers, they had come to understand, were those who asked the questions, and knew the answers. ‘Talking’, in any way beyond responding when called on to answer, was a risky business, and even in those circumstances, an incorrect answer might lead to ridicule. Requests for clarification might be tolerated, however. Where positive memories of talk were cited, it was evident that these related to individual teachers, and were not seen as part of a whole-school pedagogic approach. In some ways, this might be regarded as more ‘risky’, since one had to be clear which type of talk-teacher was in charge. This is not altogether surprising, given the wealth of research on the problems associated with the conduct of talk in the primary classroom since the days of Barnes (1976). As Chapter 2 documented, there has been a legacy of concern with classroom dialogue (Barnes, 1976; Galton 1980; Edwards and Mercer, 1983), and a concern that the NLS (DfES, 1998) has resulted in an unintentional further closing down of talk for learning (Mroz et al., 2000; English et al., 2002; Hargreaves et al., 2003; Alexander, 2004; Myhill, 2006). Although the majority of students in the study would not have been subject to the NLS themselves, most memories would have been shaped by the extent of their teachers’ engagement with the ‘Speaking and Listening’ requirements of the National Curriculum (DES, 1989). Despite the equal weighting with reading and writing, it would appear that there was little group discussion and interaction, or opportunity to express a point of view and comment on those of others.

These experiences, according to theorists (Calderhead, 1991; John, 1996; Knowles, 1992), play a pivotal role in shaping the beliefs and values of student teachers. Both Ross (1987) and Joram & Gabriele (1998) suggest that students construct a synthesized ‘ideal’ from former teachers; this is similar to Lortie’s (1975) "apprenticeship of observation" in which the years spent as pupils offer a model for teaching and foster the development of
teacher identity. Knowles & Holt-Reynolds (1991) argue that where this is the case, student teachers may go on to teach based mainly on reference to themselves as pupils, and the events they experienced. Barnes and Shemilt (1974) cautioned that teachers who saw their role as transmitting knowledge were unlikely to give pupils the time to explore new ideas, and this may suggest why talk patterns have remained unchanged – but leads us to question how a positive identity might be created from a negative memory.

If negative role-models and simplistic memories are allied to the nature of students’ epistemological beliefs, we have another powerful reason for talk-routines to stay as they are. The data showed an overwhelming belief on the part of the students that their role was that of ‘an imparter’ or ‘information giver’, and indeed that it was ‘what the job was about’. Similarly, Chapter 2 drew attention to the work of Florio-Ruane and Lensmire (1990) in which all participants held a clear picture of the teacher as an information giver, and learning as a process of internalizing a set of rules; it also considered Putnam and Borko (2000) who stress the importance of students coming to understand what learning is, and considering how they themselves learn, before they can consider how to teach others. This is not to suggest, however, that these experiences and beliefs are inflexible and not subject to change. A number of studies (Kagan, 1992; Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000; Bramald et al., 1995) discuss the notion of fixed and immovable beliefs, suggesting that tutors “with the strongest leaning towards experiential learning and reflective practice” (Bramald et al., 1995, p. 30) are the most able to effect change. A more careful consideration of ways to help student teachers to make their beliefs explicit, and to question what it means to be a teacher, would also have a positive effect on practice.

It is debatable how far the process of asking the participants in this study to consider their experiences and beliefs in relation to classroom talk can be considered as ‘fostering reflective practice’, although involving them in the process of VSRD was intended to do just that. What seemed apparent is that those who had a positive experience of talk as primary children (Demelza and Dave) and those whose first degree had problem-solving embedded (Tom and Simon) were the most confident (although not necessarily successful) in using dialogic talk. Those with negative memories, such as Serena and
Francesca, were not necessarily disengaged with the struggle to promote more symmetrical dialogue, although this was clearly a difficult experience. As indicated in Chapter 6, in an effort to allow the children ‘turns’ to speak, neither Serena, nor Bill, spoke very much at all, missing most opportunities to extend thinking. Neither Susie, nor Elizabeth, were particularly forthcoming in their initial interviews, and, of all the students, appeared the least reflective about the concept of dialogic talk itself, and of their own practice. Despite the extent, quality and longitudinal nature of their involvement in the project, which provided opportunities for reflection and development far in excess of the ‘normal’ pattern of access to a tutor before, during, and after, teaching practice, none of the case study student teachers appeared to have significantly altered their initial opinions on the value of talk as a tool for learning. What cannot be ascertained is how far their willingness to engage in patterns of talk, which were not the norm in their class, exceeded those of other students in the cohort, or even the extent to which they persevered beyond what might have been expected.

7.3.2 Classroom realities

This section considers the way in which students who have a negative, or unrealistic, picture of the role of the teacher may struggle to promote a more open mode of dialogue in their classroom.

According to the DCSF (Hobson et al., 2009) research report data obtained from a 6 year longitudinal study of student teachers indicated that the aspects of the course most valued by participants were the pragmatic/transferable skills of lesson planning; classroom management; differentiation; and educational policy and legal obligations. Those of us who have been involved with initial teacher education for some time would, perhaps, not be surprised by this, nor by the fact that most reported that they had held a “practical, classroom-orientated approach to learning to teach and had been sceptical about the value of the more ‘theoretical’ aspects of ITT provision” (p.20). Indeed, Britzman’s (1986) work on the ‘cultural myths’ of teaching, conducted some twenty five years ago, suggests that student teachers expect to receive:
Concrete products, automatic and generic methods for immediate classroom application, based on three cultural myths: 1. everything depends on the teacher; 2. the teacher is the expert; and 3. teachers are self made. (p.452)

However, as Beyer (2001) argues, theory is important, not least because of its ability to offer new understandings which can generate new ways of seeing, being, and acting. However, today’s students are entering a profession when the concept of ‘teacher professionalism’ – or identity – is subject to a great degree of external pressure, particularly with reference to teaching literacy. Bryan (2004, p.147) refers to these “externally determined constructs of professionalism and internally understood features of professionalism” with dismay, citing the degree to which teachers have lost their autonomy through delivering a mandated curriculum with specified pedagogic approaches: within this, it is possible to list both ‘interactive teaching’ and, presumably, ‘dialogic talk’.

Literature suggests that there is a strong correlation between student teaching experiences and the ways they perform in their own classrooms (Hollingsworth, 1989; Sikes et al, 1985; Cole and Knowles, 1993) and that simplistic preconceptions lead to formation of unrealistic images and expectations of practice which are subject to ‘reality shock’ in the face of real experience. It was evident that for some of the case study students, for example, Susie, Elizabeth, Bill, and to a certain extent, Francesca, behaviour management assumed a greater significance than children’s learning. Denscombe (1985) argues that this is as a result of subtle internalisation of ‘hidden pedagogy’, which assumes that classroom control is the principal remit of the teacher, and one which is vital for successful teaching. As an experienced teacher educator, it is notable that, when asked to indicate a focus for teaching observation, students regularly have to be persuaded to change their focus from behaviour management, to pupil learning. In the episodes of VSRD, the pupils’ on (or off) task behaviour was a topic which preoccupied those with a more instrumental view of teaching literacy, rather than the extent to which they believed themselves to be promoting dialogic talk.
Hollingsworth (1989) suggests that placing student teachers in classrooms with teachers who hold opposing beliefs is beneficial in that it forces them to challenge their own beliefs in a way which makes knowledge grow. Although cognitive dissonance is sometimes regarded as a barrier to learning, it would seem that, as Kagan (1992) suggests, this act of verbalizing can be constructive. For the case study students, however, the lack of positive reinforcement for all (apart from Demelza and Dave) did not lead to new knowledge; rather, it resulted in an uncomfortable questioning of a number of issues. These included the concept of dialogic talk; the student’s own role as ‘the teacher’; what might reasonably be expected of children in discussion where they were ‘too chatty’, ‘too reticent’ or possibly ‘off task’; and what the mentor’s view might be of children engaged in the noisy, and nebulous, process of dialogue. Even with the support of a university tutor, most were not at ease with their attempt to apply an unfamiliar pattern to the norms of classroom talk.
7.4 University versus school?

A great deal has been written about the perceived disconnect between university and classroom (See Poerksen, 2005; Borko and Putnam, 1996; Calderhead, 1991; Calderhead and Robson, 1991; Louden and Rohl, 2006; Moore and Ash, 2002), and Chapter 2 examined in detail the suggestion that universities needed to examine more closely the nature of their ‘training’ (or teacher education) courses. Although Kagan seems alone in suggesting ITT should focus more on the pragmatics of training (‘classroom reality’), others, such as Moore and Ash (2002) and Borko and Putnam (1996) in particular question the ‘bedrock’ of reflective practice, and urge that more attention is paid to ways of linking theory to practice, rather than merely talking about reflection. This might go some way to addressing students’ belief that an ITT course is a way of getting ‘knowledge’, and tutors’ concerns that, in a dominant discourse of standards and competence, they are unable to engage students with challenging ideas. Wubbels (1992, p. 137) alludes to “the problematic gap between theory and practice in education”; a poignant example of this is found in Moore and Ash (2002, p.11) who cite a PGCE student thus: “In school the college becomes irrelevant, and when you’re back at college, school becomes an irrelevancy. You need the two meshed together somehow”. This encapsulates the problem well, and echoes the views of students such as Elizabeth and Bill, who asserted that nobody (i.e. no experienced teacher) had ever heard of dialogic talk. The sub-text here was that as ‘real’ teachers had not engaged with it, they wondered what its value was - and in Elizabeth’s case what it was.

It was Wells who asserted that the development of communities of inquiry has been pioneered by university-based educators “e.g. Palincsar et al. 1998; Scardamalia, Bereiter and Lamon, 1994” (in Wells and Claxton, 2002, p. 203) rather than teachers themselves. He argues that this is not necessarily the model to be found in all universities, and that if we wish our teachers to work in a more reflective manner, following the precepts of sociocultural approaches to learning, we need to change the conditions of teacher education: we need to move beyond implementing the requirements of authoritative ‘experts’. In the introduction, I suggested that as a university tutor, I was expected to reach my own understanding of my role in a climate of heightened
accountability, a mandated curriculum and associated national Standards for QTS (Qualified Teacher Status). Initial Teacher Educators (ITE) at the time appeared to be treading a narrow path between compliance and reflective teaching and learning. However, despite, or perhaps because of, the unnatural divide which has occurred between practice and academic learning, we need to design ways of involving students with their own learning. The key to this may be to develop a more collaborative and reciprocal model of teaching and learning; one in which the role of epistemology (one’s beliefs about the nature of knowledge) is more clearly articulated, and alternative perspectives considered. It is clear that with the growth of a culture of ‘lifelong learning’ student teachers need to begin their professional life with the will, and ability, to engage fully and actively in the knowledge society. Claxton (2006) argues that the current narrow focus on lifelong learning for an employment agenda ignores the fact that many young people lack personal resources to cope with the high levels of challenge, complexity and individual responsibility that the twenty-first century requires. Wingate (2006) writes that although attention has been paid to students who enter HE through non-traditional routes, what is often not acknowledged is that learning at university is different, even for traditional entrants. In a league-table culture of spoon-feeding, students are less equipped for self-learning (National Audit Office, 2002). What seems evident is that when student teachers perceive a disconnect between university and the ‘real world’ of the school classroom, the potential for real engagement with thinking is lost. Taught sessions are seen as having a twofold purpose: firstly, to gain knowledge which is to be reproduced in order to pass the academic requirements of the course; secondly, to increase a professional repertoire of demonstration lessons which may be used to pass teaching practice. To develop a more transformative culture, we need to examine more closely as tutors what we mean by ‘learning’, and how we can expand young people’s capacity to learn.

Literature on Learning to Learn (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000, pp 23-26), based on the premise that intelligence is not fixed and that it is possible to develop capabilities for better learning, suggests that there is a need for tutors in Higher Education (and, I would suggest in ITT), and course leaders, to pay more careful attention to the creation of learning environments. They suggest these should be as follows: firstly, learner-centred,
paying careful attention to the knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that learners bring to the educational setting; if the teacher’s starting point is very different, then teacher and learner swiftly part company. Secondly, knowledge-centred, providing for learners’ understanding rather than performance. Thirdly, assessment-centred, strong in formative feedback. Finally, community-centred, recognising that classrooms are embedded in a larger community. The central idea, that people will learn from one another, and will try to improve their learning, is fostered by establishing explicit connections between learning experiences. In an increasingly mandated curriculum, unless universities, tutors, and school-based mentors work together to pay attention to these four interrelated attributes of effective learning environments, it seems it will become increasingly difficult to find ways of addressing autonomous learning, and linking this with practice.

Chapter 2 drew attention to the pivotal role of the relationship between the student teacher and mentor, in particular Maynard and Furlong’s (1994) three tier model of mentoring: apprenticeship, competency and, finally, reflection where students learn by critically thinking, and, in co-inquiry with the mentor, develop a deeper understanding of the process of teaching and learning. Interestingly, this has many similarities with Hargreaves’ (2000) four stages of professionalism: the ‘pre-professional’ (managerially demanding but technically simple in terms of pedagogy); the ‘autonomous’ (marked by a challenge to the uniform view of pedagogy); ‘collegial’, the building of strong collaborative cultures; and the ‘post-professional’ where teachers struggle to counter centralized curricula, testing regimes and external surveillance (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 153). For the case study students, those with the most overtly positive relationships with their university supervisors and school mentors (Tom, Dave, Demelza) as indicated by the mentors themselves, were the most positively inclined to persevere with curriculum innovation, despite the demands of the placement. Neither these students, nor their mentors, saw dialogic teaching, or the associated reflection, as ‘an extra’, and were willing to look more deeply into teaching and learning. The students who were less confident with classroom organization and match of tasks to need, such as Susie, and to a lesser extent Serena, took refuge in a culture of blame. For Susie, the children were too egocentric and ‘big red tick’ orientated to engage in discussion; the mentor was more openly critical of her teaching than the supervisor, but Susie’s lack of prior classroom experience, and her loss
of confidence, left her struggling within the apprenticeship stage of training. Serena cited the prescriptive demands of the testing regime as squeezing ‘creativity’ and dialogic talk from the curriculum; this may appear to place her in Hargreaves’ (2000) highest stage of professionalism, but conversation showed that she had not formed any sort of reflective relationship with her mentor, and had been deeply hurt by the constructive criticism offered by her university supervisor. Bill and Elizabeth were confident in the classroom, but not with engaging with dialogic talk. Of all the participants, they engaged with the theory and practice the least. Their relationship with their mentors appeared driven, in Bill’s case, by conforming to the implicit request to be polite, pleasant, and prepared; in Elizabeth’s, by conforming to the school’s drive for high standards of pupil behaviour, progress, and attainment. Both Bill and Elizabeth’s mentors exhibited an ‘amused tolerance’ of the request for the students to engage in class-based research. This was clearly seen as an ‘add-on’. Both Francesca and Simon’s relationships with their mentors were slightly troubled. Although clear that they needed the approval of the school to be successful, they were frustrated and constrained by the talk-routines of the classroom, and neither felt part of an intellectual community of practice. Both were highly reflective and eager to engage in philosophical debate about teaching and learning; in particular, they wished to ‘learn by example’, and did not feel that the examples they were offered were sufficiently pedagogically complex or challenging.

7.4.1 Creating a teaching identity: the dialogic practitioner

Chapter 2 argued that to achieve a change in patterns of classroom discourse, we need to do more than expect mentors to explain their practice and provide feedback that transcends tips for classroom management. Many students, according to Harrison (2004), enter the profession still unable to focus on children’s learning rather than their own performance, and if the induction tutor also struggles with the complexity of the role, there can be no significant shift in beginning teachers’ conception of practice. If we add to this the structure of teaching in university where the whole cohort lecture is sometimes viewed as the most efficient means of ‘delivering’ information, often that relating to ‘teaching practice’, we need to question what implicit messages we are giving about student voice, and the right to speak (McVittie, 2004; Davies, 1991). We should question
how student teachers are expected to become dialogic practitioners if there is so little opportunity to ‘see what it looks like’; a request made by several of the case study participants.

7.5 Talking to understanding

This section goes on to examine the concept of dialogic talk and suggests there has been a conceptual misunderstanding about ‘building common understanding’ and ‘reaching agreement’ and ‘talk for learning’ and social constructivism. Both Edwards and Mercer (1987) and Mercer (1995) refer to developing ‘common knowledge’, which may well assume another connotation in teachers’ minds. Even in university, the notion of the dialogic ideal implies the reaching of a ‘Eureka’ moment where we have all moved our understanding forward by talking (taking the ZPD into account). The place of ‘agreeing to disagree’, and moving one’s horizon of meaning slightly through acknowledging there can be more than one viewpoint, is not emphasized. It may be that students’ interpretation of social constructivism, ZPD, scaffolding, relates to a ‘benevolent despot’ who shapes the children’s dialogue towards common understanding. It is possible that teachers also misinterpret this as reaching ‘common (i.e. one) understanding’ or even confuse it with ‘common knowledge’. This could be the consequence of attempting to incorporate a tradition of IRF discussion with a requirement for children to work collaboratively/co-operatively to reach better understanding. This ‘better understanding’ might still be that of the teacher.
7.5.1 Defining dialogic talk: a sociocultural approach to whole class discourse

So what actually is dialogic talk; is it synonymous with exploratory talk, and what is its link with learning? The data suggest that, beyond the case study participants, the convenience samples in each cycle defined it in a loose and imprecise manner, attributing the function and form of interactive/pair discussion to their definitions. Although in general agreement that it was a ‘good thing’, most were unable to suggest in what way, at a conceptual level, it might aid thinking and learning. As the literature review suggested, at the commencement of this research project, a precise definition of dialogic talk was elusive, and, although more has been published on the subject since 2007, there has been no further guidance or exemplification made readily available for primary generalist teachers.

In searching for any written guidance which might be available for student teachers, I turned to the fourth chapter in ‘Achieving QTS in Primary English: Teaching theory and practice’ (Medwell, et al, 2009), regarded as one of the most accessible guides for pre-service teachers in England. This chapter on developing talk in the primary classroom offers 14 pages of guidance, and case study notes, on meeting the National Curriculum (DfES, 1999c) requirements for speaking and listening. Amongst the references to practical activities such as sensory play and developing story, however, are just two links to theory regarding the conduct of talk. The first reference, to Wegerif et al. (2004), tells readers that when children’s communication skills are improved, they are better able to “listen carefully…and respond constructively even if what they said was a challenge” (p. 32). The second reference, to Wolf et al. (2004, in Medwell et al. 2009), explains that “discussion-based activities in conjunction with academically challenging tasks” (p.36) have a positive impact on literacy. Later, it adds that “using language to formulate an argument and express different points of view can also be done through the more traditional channel of debates” (p. 39), although interestingly, the notion of ‘debate’ was raised by one of the participants in Cycle 2 who commented that you were not necessarily asked to express your own view. The brief references in ‘Achieving QTS’ offered more theoretical underpinning than another text entitled ‘An Introduction to Oracy: frameworks for talk’ (Holderness and Lalljee, 1998); in this volume one scant reference
appeared in the introduction, advising that children learn most effectively in Vygotsky’s (1978) ZPD as spoken language is the means of helping them to construct new meanings. Nowhere in the 242 pages was any suggestion that children might learn by disagreeing.

For a ‘definition’ it is possible to turn to Mercer and Littleton (2007) who use the terms dialogic teaching and exploratory talk. Dialogic teaching, they assert, is a term coined by Alexander (2004) to establish a specification for good practice, based on his classroom observations, and relating to teacher-pupil interactions. As indicated in the literature review, it has links with a number of theories including Palincscar and Brown’s (1984) reciprocal teaching, Wells’ (1999) dialogic enquiry, Nystrand et al.’s (2003) dialogic spells and Mortimer and Scott’s (2003) matrix of dialogic/interactive/authoritative teaching strategies in science. Interestingly, Mercer and Littleton (ibid) refer to Alexander’s call for genuinely reciprocal and cumulative dialogue, and active, engaged students, as “both descriptive and prescriptive” (p.136); rather in the same way that Lefstein (2010) spoke of dialogue being reduced to a list of indicators and teaching strategies. Exploratory talk is, it seems, derived from studies of children’s talk in groups without a teacher, such as Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes’ (1999) ‘thinking together’, although there is some suggestion that a teaching episode conducted in a dialogic/interactive way with the whole class might also be considered as promoting exploratory talk. The link between teacher-child, and pupil-pupil talk is that of scaffolding: the metaphor, drawn from Wood at al. (1976), of supporting a child’s progress through a task in a number of steps. Small Group Interaction, and exploratory talk, may be seen as a bridging or “intermediary discourse” (Haworth, 1999, p.115) which enables pupils to engage more confidently with the formal discourse of whole class interaction.

Both exploratory talk, and dialogic teaching, appears to be founded on a view of classroom dialogue as many-voiced (Alexander, 2008; Wegerif, 2008; Lefstein, 2010), in which new understandings emerge through a ‘messy’, and possibly uncomfortable, business, rather than through a harmonious and idealized discussion. To Alexander’s list (2008) of dialogic features, Lefstein (2010) therefore adds ‘meaningful’ and ‘critical ’; as Barnes (in Mercer and Hodgkinson, 2008) specifies, critical learning demands
consideration of diverging viewpoints, and an ability to recognize evidence which may be used to support them. It seems that dialogic teaching/exploratory talk may be constructed from a number of disciplines. First, it draws upon philosophical approaches, such as Burbules and Bruce (2001) on reflexivity (dialogue about dialogue) which can be linked with metacommunication. Secondly, it incorporates ideas from the work of Gadamer (1998) on ‘fusion of horizons’ and Friere (1995) on dialogue for forming knowledge of society/culture/self through dialogic processes, rather than for transmitting knowledge. Thirdly, it draws on sociocultural psychology (Vygotsky), the writings of Bakhtin and recent comparative educational research (Alexander 2001).

Turning to its connection with learning, Mercer and Littleton (2007) suggest that the link between reasoned dialogue and reasoning may have two explanations. They refer to the first as a ‘learning’ explanation; this rests on experiments with teaching children to ‘interthink’, or share and construct problem-solving strategies which they were able to internalize and apply in a variety of contexts. The second ‘development’ explanation, which has links with the first, they draw from Wegerif’s (2009) work on the opening of a dialogic space of reflection. In this ‘space’, similar to Mercer’s IDZ Intermental Development Zone, date), and Burbules’ (1993) thinking on dialogue, people are open to each others’ ideas.

The literature review indicated that a number of researchers (for example, Rojas-Drummond, 2002; Fernandez at al., 2001; Yandell, 2007; Daniels, 2001; Wegerif, 2008) have written on the importance of matching the nature of the problem-solving task closely to children’s ZPD, and opening dialectic communication. In what is termed ‘symmetrical’ talk (that is, a more even pattern), as children share understandings and explain solutions as they work, they scaffold the development of each other’s understanding. This has resonances with Rogoff’s (1991) notion of ‘guided participation’, which may not necessarily be the consequence of specific teaching. In conducting exploratory talk, children are able to problem-solve, and develop intellectually, more effectively than when working alone, yet without the need of a ‘more able’ other.

The key factor in using talk to develop learning is, therefore, the communication system[s] that the teacher establishes in lessons; this determines and shapes the talk roles pupils are able to adopt, and thus, the type of learning they engage in. It is clear that not all talk
should be dialogic (or exploratory) talk, but as Barnes (in Mercer and Hodgkinson, 2008) reminds us, the difference between exploratory and ‘presentational’ dialogue is significant for practice. Exploratory talk is described as “hesitant, broken and full of dead ends and changes of direction” (p.5), and ‘presentational’ talk as the oral version of ‘final draft’ writing. Hughes & Westgate (1998, p. 188) argue that “models of talk as ‘presentation’ and of listening as ‘reception’” now dominate even infant (KS1) classrooms; indeed, in many classrooms, and in several of the VSRD episodes, teachers, and students, too often required the latter. Children cannot be expected to engage in dialogic or exploratory talk without preparation and guidance. This requires knowledge, and confidence, on the part of the teacher, and a willingness to help pupils to try out new ways of thinking which may be radically different from their prior experience. Even for the experienced philosophy student and TESOL teacher, Simon, this proved to be a challenge.

7.5.2 Achieving common understanding, or building new understandings?
A review of the episodes of teaching in all nine case study classrooms indicated a significant issue: there was only one instance of children disagreeing with each other. This took place in the confident Dave’s lesson, but although the children were praised for having a different opinion, there was no attempt to draw the rest of the group in, to extend the dialogue, or to explore why the speakers felt as they did. In the remaining (several) hours of recorded material, children in the case study classrooms generally adopted one of four talk stances: contributing completely independently and responding to individual questions, as in Serena, Francesca and Susie’s lessons; waiting politely for the previous speaker to finish before adding a point, as in Tom, Simon and Demelza’s lessons; agreeing with the challenger, as in Elizabeth’s lesson; shouting over each other to show ‘contempt’ with the text they were being questioned about, as in Bill’s lesson. This leads to a consideration of why, firstly, there was little disagreement; secondly, why this was not specifically modeled or encouraged.

Careful consideration of the literature on classroom dialogue (for example, Mroz et al., 2000; English et al., 2002; Hargreaves et al., 2003; Alexander, 2004; Myhill, 2006), and analysis of the data from the three cycles of research, leads to a tentative suggestion:
perhaps there might have been some misunderstanding of terms such as ‘interthinking’, that is “our use of language for thinking together, for collectively making sense of experience and solving problems” (Mercer, 2000, p.1), or of Wood’s (1998) assertion that at the heart of a Vygotskian approach to learning is the notion of “co-operatively achieved success” (p.27). A possible conflation of ‘collective/collaborative’, ‘common understanding’ and ‘general agreement’ may have its roots in the history of classroom dialogue which positions the teacher as poser of questions, and possessor of the answers. In this model of talk, a successful episode of dialogue would be one in which the group talked (or thought) co-operatively together to reach an approximation of the answer which the teacher had in his/her head. In each of the lessons, despite the degree of freedom the children appeared to be given, this seemed to be the case.

If, as Lefstein (2010) suggests, dialogic talk is in danger of being reduced to a checklist of behaviours, were a practitioner to read Alexander’s (2008) 5 essential features of dialogic teaching, without careful attention to his preceding elucidation, point number 3 (supportive) would inform them that, “Children articulate their ideas freely, without fear or embarrassment over ‘wrong’ answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings” (Alexander, 2008, p.28) (my emphasis). This is not to say that the use of language is erroneous, but there is a capacity for it to be misinterpreted. Gillies (2006), for example, states that:

*When pupils work together to construct new understandings, they develop an understanding of the unanimity of purpose of the group and the need to help and support each other’s learning.* (p.272),

Similarly, in Mercer and Littleton’s (2007) work on sociocultural approaches to learning and thinking we are told that “talk is a tool for creating new shared understanding” and “teachers and learners use language to create new common knowledge” (p.6). To a casual reader, ‘common knowledge’ and ‘unanimity’ may be regarded as something indisputable; a truth, which requires general agreement, rather than a state of understanding, reached through disagreement and genuine debate.
The literature review has questioned the unreasonable emphasis on reaching the ‘dialogic ideal’ in classrooms (Lefstein, 2010; Wegerif, 2008); the use of talk is frequently advocated as a means of improving teaching and learning; advancing democratic values and pupil voice, and cultivating thinking. However, when reductive IRF exchanges are the norm, these tend to privilege reworking of teacher utterances, rather than ‘new meaning’ or even ‘common understanding’. Habermas (1979) claimed that mutual trust, respect, and a willingness to listen are required for a conversation, or ‘ideal speech situation’, and it was apparent that each of the students were attempting to establish these conditions within their classrooms. An examination of Burbules’ (1993) three rules for dialogic talk: voluntary participation, commitment, and reciprocity, however, leads to speculation that the first of those, voluntary participation, has not shaped the approach to talk that the students in the research cycles experienced. It should also be noted that not one of the children in any of the videoed episodes framed, or was expected to frame, a question of their own (unless one considers the implicit question by Edd’s ‘able readers’ about the simplicity of the text chosen for discussion). Commeyras (1995, p.105) suggested that if children need help in forming questions, it is probably because “their natural inquisitiveness has been depressed through current schooling practices”. This is a depressing statement, but one that is amply reinforced by the childhood experiences of the purposive samples in Cycles 2 and 3.

Although Burbules & Bruce (2001) stress the need to look beyond patterns of Q & A and consider the ‘spirit’ of the talk, it seems evident that that there still remains a misunderstanding of the place that disagreement plays in building new understanding. If there has been a conflation of ‘agreement’ and ‘harmonious discussion’, perhaps disagreement has been conflated with Mercer et al.’s (1995) ‘disputational’ talk. Here, conversation is regarded as conflict, with speakers treating the intellectual activities of others as a threat; argument is privileged over agreement, and the goal is seen as making your point and ‘winning’ the argument. The key difference here lies in the potential for opening a ‘dialogic space’. In disputational talk, children are not open to one others’ ideas; in exploratory talk, there may be disagreement, but this begins from a starting point of being open, and willing to change one’s mind. ‘Disagreement’, however, holds negative connotations; perhaps in our drive for a more democratic form of dialogue,
teachers might prefer to refer to ‘alternative views’, or “the formulation of arguments and the evaluation of evidence” (Maloney, 2007, p.373).

7.5.3 “Backing up Vygotsky”

It has been argued in the section above that this misunderstanding about the nature of talk for learning might have underpinned practice for some time. As a university tutor, it is clear that frequently student teachers’ assignments specify that the writers are ‘backing up Vygotsky’ [sic] by making a broad reference to the use of pair talk as a means of addressing the speaking and listening requirements of the National Curriculum (DfEE, 1999), or, more broadly, to allow children to rehearse ideas for writing. What is less evident is an understanding that cognitively challenging talk is, in itself, a learning medium. That disagreement is not the same as rudeness, or being self-opinionated, and that when children (or students) care enough to argue about something, that is worth celebrating as it is more likely to lead to strong concept formation. There are clear links here with memories of understanding one’s place as a child in the classroom; of understanding that the expectation was that any opinion expressed should relate to the teacher’s view, and that children talking out of turn is a sign of poor behaviour management.

7.6 Talk as a democratic principle

The previous section made reference to the notion of ‘talking out of turn’. This has further significance, since each of the case study students, regardless of their confidence, or conceptual understanding, privileged a model of dialogue which appeared to be based on an internalized sense of democracy: that is, ensuring ‘fair turns’ for all to speak. This preoccupation with the teacher’s role as a referee of turns was also evident in the responses of most students in the 3 cycles of research (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6). For example, 18 of the 23 students sampled in Cycle 2 believed that a significant part of their role was to make sure everyone’s voice was heard, and that no-one dominated the talk. In the case study classrooms, opportunities for extended thinking/dialogue were lost, as
the students attempted to draw in quieter members of the group, or to draw lines of dialogue to a close in order to pose another question.

As the literature review indicated, this preoccupation with participation, rather than thematic continuity (Alexander, 2001), often resulted in brief unsustained interactions as the students drove towards their objectives (or in the case of Elizabeth, where there was no stated objective, towards a conclusion). Only Simon appeared to persevere in the face of the children’s puzzlement, attempting to draw out contributions without nominating pupils. Even so, his e-mail expressed concern that he should, perhaps, have made more attempt to ‘draw in’ the quieter children. This attempt to ensure an equal distribution of teacher time and attention among all the pupils, and participation by all of them in oral work, links with Alexander’s (2001) work on the cultural differences with France and Russia. This notion of ‘fair turns’ may have become an embedded feature of English pedagogical culture for two reasons: firstly, the ‘guilty’ heritage of the hugely influential Plowden Report (CACE, 1967); secondly, the exemplars provided by the NLS videos. The Plowden Report, which placed children at the heart of the curriculum, stressed the importance of individual interaction. As the ORACLE study (Galton et al., 1980) showed, however, in large classes, the teacher’s attempt to ‘interact’ with all children during whole class teaching was doomed to failure, as it was impossible to manage lengthy conversational/dialogic exchanges with each pupil. As Simon (1985) complained, primary education in England appeared to focus on individualization at the expense of pedagogy. With the introduction of the training videos (DfES, 1998b), whole class literacy teaching was now seen to be based upon rapid, often closed and unextended, question and answer routines (see Chapter 2 for more detail). As the Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2003) followed hot on its heels, teachers now not only had to reconcile fast-paced, but extended, questioning, but also the exhortation that individualization was vital. They were asked to teach the same content, in the same way, to all pupils (Eke & Lee, 2009), but to ensure they used assessment as a tool for learning. The resulting confusion perhaps offered one certainty: ‘interactive teaching’ was what they had ‘always done’, and this had meant everyone had a chance to say something.
What is apparent is that simply managing turns does not open up the possibility for cognitive growth. As Alexander (2001) suggests, this cultural model of competitive bidding for attention and searching for the ‘right’ answer is evidence of the way in which children learn to ‘get by’. As Mejia and Molina (2007) add, in TOM (The Opinion Market) the students’ goal is to demonstrate engagement through speaking and the important thing is to be seen (or heard) to contribute, regardless of what is actually said, children quickly learn that the important thing is to take part. Praise is often given for just that: offering a response, rather than for its quality, relevance, or depth of thought. This is distinct from the confusion over ‘interactive’ teaching.

7.6.1 Pace

This section turns to another aspect of the students’ management of questioning. The literature review discussed at some length the pedagogic complexities of maintaining pace at the expense of extended thinking/dialogue, and its unfortunate conflation with ‘interactive teaching’ (for example, Mroz et al., 2000; English et al., 2002; Hargreaves et al., 2003; Alexander; 2004, and Myhill, 2006). The taught Postgraduate English course at university for the last three years has deliberately made no reference to teaching with pace (in the context of the PNS), nor ‘interactively’, apart from to tease out what might be meant by ‘interactive’ in a more general context. It was apparent, however, that the case study students, although eager to ensure all had a turn to speak, tended to move on swiftly without the use of thinking time. Alexander’s definition of the five aspects of pace is helpful at this point:

Organisational Pace: the speed at which lesson preparation, transitions, and so on, are handled.
Task pace: the speed at which learning tasks and activities are undertaken.
Interactive pace: pace of talk exchanges and handling of turns.
Cognitive/semantic pace: speed at which conceptual ground is covered, or ratio of new material to old.
Learning pace: how fast pupils actually learn (p. 424)
It appeared that it was generally interactive pace driving the exchanges, although in Elizabeth’s lesson there was accidental cognitive pace as she was not only surprised that the children were able to discuss the text, but also to relate it to classroom learning. In this incidence, the children themselves were driving the pace. Serena’s lesson lacked pace of any sort, particularly that relating to cognitive or learning gains. The question which needs to be asked is how did the students learn this routine, if not in university sessions? It may be that informal feedback from mentors looked back to the original NLS and asked explicitly for ‘more pace’, or perhaps students have merely observed, and replicated, the discourse patterns from the practice classrooms. In the VSRD interviews, the students were unanimous in their assertion that they had ‘never heard of interactive teaching’, and Demelza alone attempted to define it. It seems significant that, despite being involved in classroom research on dialogic teaching, and having an understanding of the need for sustained and cognitively challenging dialogue, the students were still constrained by pace.

7.7 Probing: using the answer as the fulcrum of the learning exchange

Section 7.6 examines the connection between the literature on management of question-and-answer routines and the dialogue patterns observed in the case study classrooms. As the following discussion explains, the student teachers all, with the exception of Simon in Cycle 2, appeared reluctant to probe the children’s answers at more than a superficial level, and, as suggested above, this may relate partly to a mistaken sense of democratically motivated pedagogy. There may also have been subject-knowledge related issues with both Serena and Bill making reference explicitly to the sense of insecurity about developing pedagogic and per se subject knowledge whilst still at an early state of becoming a teacher; this could go some way to explaining the lack of ‘genuine’ questions asked in most episodes. Finally, in many university-based sessions, student teachers are directed to research on the reductive nature of many classroom interactions. Teachers talk too much, and children do not say enough, is the message; they are also told that there is a need to intervene at ‘key moments’ to take children’s
learning forward rather than dominate the discussion. The fear of being dominant may also begin to explain why they are reluctant to probe answers, for fear of being seen as ‘the person (dominant) who asks all the questions’. Section 7.6, therefore, looks more closely at IRF exchanges, and the role of subject knowledge.
Since the growth of academic critique of interactive teaching, and the IRF discourse formats, associated with the Literacy Hour examined in Chapter 2, university ITT courses have drawn attention to the ‘dangers’ of a restrictive recitation script. Student teachers have been made aware of the importance of asking ‘better’ (i.e. higher order, or open) questions, and cautioned to avoid responses which close down opportunities for cognitive growth. Both Alexander (2001) and Nystrand (1997) stress that the choices made by teachers in modes of classroom interaction have major implications for the epistemological development of the class, and the way that children are positioned as learners. True ‘many voicedness’ (to use the Bakhtinian term, heteroglossia), according to Nystrand (1997, p.2), requires teachers to go beyond their ‘considerable lip service’ to discussion in order to develop an ethos of involvement and respect. Besides genuine questions, important dialogic approaches to instruction highlighted by his research were the incorporation of children’s responses into subsequent questions, and high level evaluation where children modified the discourse. However, although Nystrand (1997) and others are critical of the IRF structure, new insight is provided by a number of researchers. Wells (1999) for example believes it need not be a negative experience; where the F (feedback) move is used to request exemplification, clarification or justification, the learning transcends knowledge recall and can encourage pupils to review, generalize or speculate on what has been learned. Inagata, Morito and Hatano’s (1999) research on the construction of mathematical argument through discourse in Japanese classrooms similarly suggests that where teachers ask conceptually challenging questions, and the evaluative/feedback turn is taken by children, it fosters the development of, and capacity for, evaluative thinking. The importance of this ‘third turn’ is also emphasized by Macbeth (2003), who highlights the rich potential of QWKA (questions with known answers) in aiding the construction of knowledge.

What makes talk ‘functionally dialogic’, according to Mortimer and Scott (2003) is not the number of speakers involved, but that a range of points of view are both represented and developed. Their framework for evaluating discourse in secondary science proposes an IRFRF pattern to promote just this. It appears, therefore, a false dichotomy to suggest
that the use of an IRF format excludes dialogic approaches to teaching per se. As Hicks (2003) suggests, its structure may be relatively stable, but its functions vary. Where children’s answers do not mark the end of the exchange with the teacher automatically closing it, there is rich potential for learning. If IRF was more positively reinterpreted as Initiation, Response, Feedforward, there might be more productive and reciprocal dialogue.

The case study material frequently showed that in an effort not to dominate the discussion (a ‘bad thing’), or to ensure all group members to had a turn (necessary for ‘individualised learning’) the study students sometimes gave no feedback at all. In Bill, Susie, Serena and Elizabeth’s classes, this resulted in a kind of democratic ‘free for all’ in which the children received no direction, or guidance, on how their answers were viewed; the student teachers themselves restricted their input to hand gestures and vague noises which they themselves interpreted as ‘promoting dialogue’. As Alexander (2001) states, this has the effect of leaving children to speculate about how far their thoughts are being charitably dismissed. Tom, the first participant, went as far as removing himself physically from the group in order to ensure that the children neither questioned him, nor directed their answers towards him. Francesca and Simon shared some degree of commonality. Both tried repeatedly to encourage the children to express their own views, and to respond to each other, but became frustrated by the results. Francesca found herself speaking more, rather than less, to attempt to model extended answers, and her Feedback moves were, indeed, lengthy, whilst Simon eventually found himself offering possible answers from which the children selected one. Both these students were frustrated by the role they found themselves adopting, but felt there was nobody within the school who could direct them to manage this better. In Demelza and Dave’s classes, the questions which were asked were still not ‘genuine’ questions, if we accept Hardman’s (in Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008) definition of ‘genuine’ as a question shaped by the utterances that precede them. They did, however, experience a little more success than their peers in eliciting personal responses to the text, and sometimes pupils offered a follow-up comment.
Dillon's (1994) work on alternatives to questions suggested the use of strategies such as expressing an interest in the speaker’s point of view. It was apparent in all the classroom interactions that the students modelled active listening skills, and appeared genuinely interested in what the children were saying. It was clear, however, that this was mostly unconnected with expecting the unexpected, but looking for the required answer. Dillon also suggests expressing one’s own view on the matter, and, alone amongst the students, Dave suggested in his reflection, that it would have been a good idea to show the children how much he himself cared about the book. Demelza, Tom and Simon were confident in their use of back-channel moves, signaling with gestures, verbal signals and pauses, that children should hold or take back their turns and continue expressing a view. Unfortunately, they rarely allowed a speaker to interject in their desire to drive towards the answer, or objective under discussion.

In drawing on work by Black and William (1998), Chapter 2 suggested that there is a need for teachers to teach learners how to reflect on the process of thought itself, rather than rewarding convergence on the ‘correct’ answer. As Dave commented in discussing his lesson, “I could have asked them why they thought that”. Perhaps until student teachers (and possibly teachers) understand that discussing why one thinks something can lead to construction of knowledge at a deeper level than stating what one thinks, then the IRF format will continue to dominate classroom talk. Later work by Christoph and Nystrand (2001) also states unequivocally that a key factor in promoting dialogic discourse is the teacher’s ability to make links between curriculum, or academic, goals, and real life issues of concern outside the classroom. A social constructivist perspective thus indicates that a ‘wrong’ answer might be the consequence of personal interpretation, subject to question, and part of a particular theoretical possibility.

7.7.2 The place of subject knowledge in developing pupil talk

This section refers to the place of subject knowledge in developing classroom talk. Not all of the case study students specifically mentioned its importance in opening up questioning, although Serena and Bill did express concerns about the level of their knowledge, and Demelza spontaneously revealed her own high levels when she reflected
on the need to teach metalanguage before the children were able to discuss texts with confidence (interestingly, Williamson and Hardman (1995) identified gaps in the knowledge of PGCE student teachers who themselves lacked a metalanguage for talking about, and analyzing, language). The issue of subject knowledge in developing pedagogy is complex. It seems a given that the “more one knows about one’s subject, the more effective one can be as a teacher” (Ball, 1991, p. 3), but according to Ellis (2007) teachers’ subject knowledge has been regarded as “fixed and easily codifiable: its measurement an apparently simple public token to exchange for professional status” (p.448). However, if discourse patterns are to change to accommodate more child-centred participation, this clearly requires a sophisticated level of understanding of the subject, what ever is meant by ‘subject knowledge’ in this context, and a skillful ability to develop and manage talk. Although, as iterated above, this was not expressed as a concern by all of the participants, it seems a powerful reason why channels of talk were kept closely focused on the objective, beyond a wish to assess how far the children had ‘reached’ it by the end of the lesson. What seemed evident was that, whilst Tom, Demelza, Simon and Francesca were confident in their subject knowledge, and of the class, and able to rephrase questions, they still stayed closely focussed on the key questions they had devised (or the subject knowledge they had revised) beforehand. The remaining 5 case study students did not open up questioning, chain responses or, in Bill, Susie and Elizabeth’s case, demonstrate any subject knowledge per se – and little pedagogical subject knowledge. In Serena’s lesson, it is debatable if the children made any gains in knowledge or understanding; although her comprehension of literary features was sufficient to lead the discussion, and answer any questions – had the children been encouraged to pose any – her understanding of how to structure a teaching session for 5 competent year 1 readers was not sufficient.

There are many models of teacher subject knowledge, and it is not the intention of this study to critique them, however, most are based to varying degrees on the work of Shulman (1986, 1987), Calderhead (1988), and Eraut (1994). Leach and Moon (2000) and Banks et al. (1999) also refer to Lave’s (1988) concepts of arena and setting to suggest the complexity of knowledge creation, and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘communities of practice’ in articulating the development of professional knowledge. Ellis
(2007) refers to an ‘autonomous professionalism perspective’ in which a ‘given’ knowledge is converted by teacher education into “a special category of teacher knowledge that should play out in classrooms as good teaching and learning” (p. 448), suggesting that this is something which is better accessed and developed within the contexts in which beginning teachers find themselves as learners. If, as he posits, the classroom is the most appropriate place for stimulating, supporting and, researching subject knowledge development, this would be more productive than the completion of tick lists and audits, and conducting debates on the merits of the various models of professional/subject knowledge which often underpin ITT programmes at university.

There is a wealth of literature on the problems associated with developing student teachers’ subject knowledge, particularly in maths and science. Traianou (2006), for example, explains that “big ideas” constructivists argue that teachers’ misunderstandings in science can result from making inappropriate links between experience and knowledge or from use of misleading everyday language. Perhaps more worryingly, Shallcross et al.’s (2002) research suggests that trainees are being asked to teach areas of NC science about which their school mentors are uncertain, whilst Bibby (1999) speculates that in mathematics, teachers are perpetuating their own experiences as unconnected skills and procedures and passing these on to a new generation, much in the way that this thesis argues student teachers are replicating their own talk experiences. Murphy (2006), however, considers the role of the generalist teacher:

> Teachers of primary mathematics need to know and understand the subject in a different way to the subject specialist. Teachers’ knowledge of mathematics should be of sufficient depth to enable them to represent it in a variety of ways and to be flexible enough to enable them to interpret students’ ideas and address misconceptions. (p.229)

This seems to encapsulate the level of knowledge that one would wish primary student teachers to have in English; not the ability to define a prepositional phrase, but the confidence and flexibility to draw on children’s naïve understandings, and to work with them, and, as Wyse and Jones (2002) argue convincingly, to read and become knowledgeable about a range of children’s literature. Both Medwell et al. (1998) and Twisleton (ibid) assert that ‘non-experts’ fear teaching English/literacy and that this leads
to ‘script following’, although according to Cajkler and Hislam (2002) NQTs are entering the profession at a time when teachers are rebuilding confidence and knowledge about grammar. If, however, some students have gained the impression that grammar is just about learning terms and definitions, rather than understanding its function in the choices a writer has to make, this may well impact on the confidence to open the floor to discussion. It may explain to some extent why students are concerned about their levels of subject knowledge and reluctant to apply literacy skills in a variety of contexts, and draw on children’s experiences beyond the classroom. It may also explain why it is easier for mentors to provide feedback on the incorrect identification of word classes, than a missed opportunity to extend thinking. There appears to be a link between subject knowledge-related anxieties, and the student’s personal construct of the teacher. As Barnes and Shemilt (1974) cautioned, teachers who saw their role as transmitting knowledge were unlikely to give pupils the time to explore new ideas.

The literature review suggested (Twisleton, 2006; Medwell et al, 1998; Poulson et al., 2001) that in literacy, pedagogical content knowledge is synonymous with subject knowledge and it is not practical to separate knowledge from application. Their work suggests that expert teachers are able to draw on a variety of knowledge bases to respond to ‘learning questions’, seizing the moment to develop knowledge in a way that beginning teachers cannot. Researchers such as Hurry and Parker (2004), however, contend that teachers’ ‘implicit knowledge’ is frequently modelled in ‘implicit teaching’, leading, for example, to ineffective teaching of comprehension strategies which should be based on explicit knowledge. The notion of explicit teaching was examined more recently by Sutherland (2006) who examined the effect of explicitly coaching English specialist secondary PGCE student teachers in the techniques of exploratory talk. The findings indicated that even after coaching, those with high levels of specialist subject knowledge found it difficult to hand more control of the discourse to pupils, although those with TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) found the “less controlling role easier to adopt” (p. 113). Both Susie and Simon had this teaching qualification, but for Susie it was not an aid to relinquishing control, or indeed, to developing control. For Simon, who was desperate to relinquish control, high levels of subject knowledge came to be seen as a barrier. Where previously he had regarded the range of possibilities inherent in a
question as exciting, he had begun to see them as a source of confusion for the children. The role of subject knowledge is, therefore, a thorny issue. Perhaps the key lies not in feeling confident that one has the answers, or even a range of potential answers, but in feeling confident to adopt the role of ‘learner’, and make learning strategies explicit. Until student teachers are able to do this, less ‘authentic’ questions will continue to be asked.

This seeming contradiction between levels of explicit and implicit knowledge is, perhaps, addressed by Poulson et al (2001) who refer to teachers’ beliefs and values being shaped by the times when they trained and entered the profession, and to the “dominant values of the time” (p. 273), and Alexander (1992) who adds that people are often reluctant to express unpopular beliefs, particularly if they run counter to current thinking. It may be that mentors who trained after 1998, when a renewed emphasis was placed upon subjects knowledge by the TDA, have not perceived the interconnectedness between aspects of English subject knowledge, and have provided more critical feedback on knowledge per se, than pedagogical subject knowledge. Those who trained before Circular 4/98 (DFEE, 1998c) are, perhaps, less persuaded that high levels of subject knowledge are an essential component of teaching.

To consider what the role of subject knowledge might be in developing sufficient confidence to conduct more even dialogue (or dialogic dialogue), I return to the work of Ellis (2007) and Green (2006) who both suggest a more ‘situated’ view of the process. In his study of secondary English specialist student teachers, Green (2006) refers to ‘deliverable subject models’; this involves a realignment of subject knowledge, its practical and theoretical application in the classroom (within the parameters of content, school, pedagogic, substantive and syntactic knowledges) and the version of the subject that student teachers are able and happy to teach. This constantly needs “to be re-evaluated in the light of such issues as individual and whole-class needs or the purposes of particular teaching sessions or sequences of sessions” (p. 121) offering a more situated view than that of a ‘tick list’. This suggests that teacher educators need to collaborate more closely with mentors and schools, which would clearly prove challenging for primary ITT departments who might well be working with upwards of 500 schools. High level feedback and shared deconstruction of teaching exchanges might prove
effective in helping the students to understand the place of, and ways to develop, subject knowledge, but for Demelza and Dave, mentor feedback had indicated that they were ‘doing wonderfully well’, and that the school had no need to direct them. For Serena, feedback from her university tutor had resulted in denial, and a loss of confidence.

Subject knowledge seems to be destined to hover uncertainly between centre-based audits and ‘gaps’, often driven by the latest TDA requirements (for example, phonic terminology and the Simple View of reading), and the breadth of knowledge and range of pedagogic strategies needed to explain a concept to children a number of ways, or to respond to a question in such a fashion that it does not close down the cognitive possibilities. Until the situatedness of learning is addressed, it is possible that student teachers will always be hesitant about their levels of understanding.

7.8 The way it always has been?

In considering the themes which have emerged from this research, the question which remains to be addressed is how far it is possible for talk routines to change. The literature, and the data, suggested that teacher/pupil talk roles had not changed significantly in terms of cognitive demand, or allocation of question/answer authority, since Barnes’ (1976) writing, although the number of questions asked had increased since the inception of the NLS (DfES, 1998a). The issue of the tenacity of these restrictive patterns of talk is addressed by Mercer and Littleton (2007), who argue that it is the pivotal role played by unwritten, implicit ground rules that have ensured this; they also suggest that teachers’ concern that they should not ‘tell’ children things has led them to ask unnecessary questions. This lack of genuine questions was discussed by Dewey (1944) almost 70 years ago when he urged teachers to consider whose question it actually was: the students’, the teacher’s or the text book’s, and it continued to be a cause for concern for Nystrand et al. (1997) in their focus on ‘genuine’ questions. This suggests, depressingly, that classroom dialogue is, generally, still ‘the way it has always been’.
The cultural myth that teachers do not change, that change is painful, and teachers are recalcitrant, appears, according to Klein (1969), to have been perpetuated by agents of change themselves; however, if it was anticipated that the NLS (DfES, 1998a) or National Curriculum (DfEE, 1999c) would lead educational change, and alter talk routines, then there was a failure to examine the rich literature on the success (or otherwise) of top down initiatives. Many sources (for example, Murphy, 2001; Devaney and Sikes, 1988; Sikes, 1992; Sinatra, 2004) argue that that mandated change often results, for example, in practitioners viewing their head teachers as uninformed about the mandates, or the nature of needs within the school. This may lead to a gulf between rhetoric and reality, and a difference between knowing what one is supposed to do, and actually doing it. According to Wells and Claxton (2002, p. 206) there are two key reasons why pedagogic change may not take place: firstly, the “commodification of knowledge” and secondly “intolerance of diversity”. Any change, therefore, can only occur through the creative agency of teachers who are committed to the underlying principles, but that change may not be that which was anticipated.

Although writers such as Fullan (2001) continue to suggest that we need to strive for improvement, using powerful vocabulary such as ‘connectedness’, ‘synergy’ and ‘alignment improvement’, as the literature review indicated, we need to examine what we mean by change. In deeming students’ views ‘inflexible’, ‘Inflexibility’ is an ambiguous concept covering a spectrum from an entire cohort moving towards the stated aims of the course to small individual changes in beliefs. There are those who challenge this notion of inflexibility (for example Roberts 1998; Cabaroglu and Roberts 2000; Cabaroglu and Denicolo, 2008; Sugrue, 1997; Stevens et al. 2004) in studies which focus more specifically on the growth of student self-identity-as-teacher and development of belief systems. What should also be considered, particularly in relation to classroom dialogue, is a possible conflict between what prior experience has shown to be the case and what students’ belief systems indicate might be a better way to do things. Here, it is not adherence to observed practice that proves resistant to the constructivist learning environment in university, but confusion and anxiety. This has its roots in their vivid memories of leaning to get by or bidding for attention (Alexander 2005) and a sense of injustice that their voice was not valued.
Richardson (1994) argues that by engaging teachers in reflection about the own practice, using video, it is possible to bring about changes in practice, but that creating more autonomous change-orientated teachers can prove confusing to children who encounter a number of different approaches to teaching within one school. The experiences of the student teachers in the case study classrooms indicated that even by the end of Year 1, children were so encultured into patterns of dialogue that they found it impossible to adapt to the way of talking the student proposed; when the student is also unsure, things revert to the status quo. For embedded change to occur, much work in this area (see, for example, Bransford et al., 1999; Massengill-Shaw et al. 2008; Wells and Claxton, 2002) emphasizes the importance of ensuring constructivist learning experiences for student teachers, scaffolded through active encouragement and explicit modelling, in situated learning environments. As Muijs and Reynolds (2002) and Milner (2005, p.769) posit, a shift in understanding is more likely to occur through “linking theory to practice and connecting practice to theory”. Change, it seems, could best be achieved not through top-down initiatives, nor through teaching ‘the right way to do things’ (i.e. not how it is done in your school) at university, but though ensuring that there is a closer connection between the teaching of theoretical perspectives and the site of practice itself: the classroom. In these times of financial constraints, when tutor visits to school are being pared back, it is difficult to conceptualise quite how this might be achieved. What is certain, however, is that without a more careful consideration of the explicit links between theory and practice; classroom and university; it is unlikely that there will be a significant shift in practice. With the benefit of hindsight, foregrounding of the research underpinning the NLS (DfES, 1998a) might have enabled interested and motivated teachers to focus less on the structure, and more on the cognitive underpinning, of talk.
7.9 Considering the factors which impact on the promotion of dialogic talk

This chapter has posited that the factors which impact on student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk are complex and interlinked; that this may be traced to their own experiences as primary pupils where talk was controlled by the teacher and the relationship of this to the creation of their own teaching identity. It has suggested that the experience of teaching practice is not always positive, and that the difference between mentors’/class teachers’ espoused and enacted practice can lead to a sense of cognitive dissonance which results in defaulting to surface strategies of ‘getting by’, and attempting to become accepted into the existing culture and routines of talk management. It went on to speculate that there has been some misunderstanding of social constructivist principles, and a conflation of ‘developing common knowledge’ and ‘reaching agreement’, and that this is linked to a misunderstanding of the nature of ‘interactive’ teaching and the culturally developed notion of democratic turn-taking. It suggests that subject knowledge plays a significant role in the student teacher’s willingness to relinquish control of the dialogue. Finally, it argues strongly that there has been, not a paucity of theoretical guidance on dialogic talk, but a complete lack of any information for generalist primary teachers.

The lack of guidance on dialogic talk, however, appears to be the most significant factor on its promotion in the primary classroom. Although it has been stated regularly, and by a wide variety of literature, that the guidance provided on ‘interactive teaching’ was poor; insufficiently theoretical; accompanied by video clips of rapid, often closed, question-and-answer routines, there were at least some opportunities for teachers (and student teachers) to see what it might look and sound like, and even to discuss their (mis)understandings. As Chapter 2 indicated, there has been no information provided, no videos, ‘fliers’ or exemplification since the inclusion of that brief phrase in the Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics (DfES, 2006, p.40): “Use principles of dialogic talk to explore ideas, topics or issues”. The work of leading academics, also examined in the literature review, has indicated that there is not one single definition, but a number of
common themes, related to dialogic talk, and that it is sufficiently different from interactive teaching for practitioners to regard it as ‘not something we do anyway’. As none of the teachers in any of the case study schools had heard of it, then it must be speculated that they had been unaware of its principles, were not promoting it, and seemed doubtful about its existence. If ‘interactive teaching’ became viewed as a label, then surely dialogic teaching runs the risk of becoming just another label. It is appropriate here to return to the words of Demelza quoted in Chapter 6:

There’s a definite challenge about people a. understanding what it is, and b. understanding why it’s not just a fancy word, or a new idea or theory that will go out of use. I think that’s a barrier, which is why, having spoken to people about it, it’s ‘what’s that?’ then move on. They don’t really engage with it, it’s just a label.

Demelza’s belief that it is not a fancy idea that will go out of use is encouraging – but I would suggest, overoptimistic. As the preceding chapters suggest, there are many complex strands: memories, experiences, values, capacity to learn, resilience, to name but a few, which either work together to develop a dialogic teacher, or somehow fail to enable the emerging practitioner to move beyond ‘what we have always done’. Chapters 2 and 7 examined in depth the link between teaching practice and creation of a teaching identity (for example, Smith, 2005; Maynard, 2000; Hayes, 2000; Campbell & Kane, 1998; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Kagan, 1992; Calderhead & Robson, 1991). Although this is a crucial factor in becoming a critically reflective practitioner who uses talk to become a concept builder rather than a curriculum manager (Twiselton, 2006), it is not the only one. Fig. 20 below represents a range of contributory factors, and, whilst not suggesting that all have to be in place to create a climate for the development of dialogic talk, or that it is impossible to transcend negative memories from childhood, it does posit that there has to be a degree of intersection. If the practice school encourages risk taking and speculation, a student with poor subject knowledge, or a limited repertoire of teaching strategies, will be unlikely to capitalize on this. Conversely, a reflective student with a willingness to engage at theoretical level might unfortunately become encultured within an environment of low-level knowledge provision.
Fig. 21: Factors influencing student teachers’ promotion of dialogic talk

Beliefs, values and prior experience
- Positive memories of talk at primary school
- Encouragement from home to 'speculate'
- Views teacher as partner in knowledge construction
- Sees knowledge as 'shifting' and context-related

Personal traits
- Resilience
- Ability to engage at a theoretical level
- Good subject knowledge
- Reflective
- Problem-solver

School factors
- Supportive, risk-taking environment
- Positive relationship with mentor
- Closer links between theory & practice
- Promotes talk for learning
- Class teacher able to articulate practice
- Willingness to engage in action research

University factors
- Making closer links between theory & practice
- Explicit modelling of talk for learning
- Providing practical & theoretical support
- Offering opportunity to engage in action research
Chapter 8: Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This thesis sought to investigate the factors which affect student teachers’ ability to promote dialogic talk in their practice classrooms and this chapter presents recommendations for further research, practice and policy regarding this. The project was centred within one university’s ITE department and involved 3 cohorts of postgraduate students and 9 partner primary schools. The practice classrooms were located in a variety of inner-city, urban and rural locations, served a wide range of socio-economic catchment areas, and had great variation in pupil numbers: the smallest school containing just 25 children. The aim was to gain greater insight into the explicit and hidden beliefs, memories, values and circumstances which impact positively, or negatively, to create dialogic student teachers. Through acting as a partner in the action research process, using a variety of methods, including reflective writing, interviews, VSRD and lesson observation, 9 student teachers were helped to critically analyse their own practice, and verbalise their emerging pedagogic and conceptual understandings of dialogic talk.

Building on the project, this section goes on to suggest productive directions for future research and practice. At the time of writing, however, a new Government White Paper (2010a) is suggesting radical changes in the direction and purpose of Initial Teacher Education by expanding school-based routes into teaching. Using a model of ‘teaching schools’ (similar to teaching hospitals) they propose a transfer of responsibility for monitoring progress towards the QTS Standards to the National College of School Leadership. Given that the government’s stated aim is to focus on the teaching of reading and mathematics, managing behavior and responding to Special Educational Needs, these suggestions are made in a spirit of optimism that universities may still have a part to play in improving practice, perhaps through working more closely with schools. Further, that productively managing dialogue may be viewed as an essential aim in itself, as well as a factor in developing high quality teaching. This is examined further in section 8.4.2.
8.2 Future directions for research

Although this study has engaged with, and attempted to answer, the original research questions, it is suggested that further research would strengthen and clarify some of the conclusions. To be of benefit to all involved in the education of children from practitioners, to university tutors, and indeed, policy makers, a number of areas have suggested themselves as fruitful for further investigation. These include researching the talk histories and epistemological positions of all student (pre-service) teachers; developing research partnerships with practice schools; establishing stronger links between theory and practice by both examining the nature of university courses and changing the university/school partnership. These issues are explored in more depth below.

8.2.1 Obtaining ‘talk histories’

The focus for this thesis was directed on the efforts of the student teachers themselves as they engaged with developing a professional identity, and attempted to manage curriculum requirements, and curriculum innovation (dialogic talk). Considering the rich and informative data returned on talk memories, it would seem productive to obtain this data from students on all routes into teaching, rather than postgraduate alone. This would provide an overview of the views that all pre-service teachers hold about talk, the way in which they might approach the whole experience of learning to be a teacher, and confidence with which they might be open to more dialogic modes of interaction with their own classes. It is not possible to speculate how different the results might have been had the research focused on experienced teachers, although the literature does indicate a lack of deep understanding of the role of dialogue; further, the data suggested a lack of pedagogical knowledge of current curricular directives on approaches to promoting it.

Criticism of educational research (Woodhead, 1998; Hillage et al., 1998; Tooley, 1988) has, in the past, suggested that it lacks purpose: that neither teachers nor policy makers could draw upon it to improve practice. Indeed, a recent Ofsted inspection made clear that practitioner research was only considered of value if it impacted on the learning of not only the students, but also their pupils. It is argued that the data obtained from an
investigation of talk history might be used productively to frame the way that university sessions and lectures are conducted, learning environments created, and teaching practice structured. Although falling outside the scope of this project, The Talk History analysis has also been productively used on the GTP (school-based) programme to question established practice, suggesting that a move to situating more training in the classroom would not necessarily negate further research on the subject.

8.2.2 Considering epistemology

Closely linked with the suggestions regarding talk histories, it would also be profitable to look closely at the students’ epistemological beliefs, and to examine how these are applied in a variety of situations. The research indicated that students across the three cohorts overwhelmingly saw their role as information givers, and knowledge as a fixed commodity to be ‘imparted’ to [and even ‘on’] children. Chapter 2 indicated that for some time, teacher educators have been urged to pay attention to the beliefs which students bring with them to university, and shape the extent to which they are open to different ideas, and willing to engage in dialogic talk themselves. A single module exploring concepts such as ‘Learning [how] to Learn’ is unlikely to make a significant difference in thinking unless its principles are embedded across the entire course. Although it has been acknowledged previously in this work that the duration of an ITE course is, perhaps, too short a short period of time to see significant epistemological growth/change, there are ways to develop this. It should be possible during their education for student teachers to be encouraged to consider, and reconsider, their beliefs about the nature of knowledge, their role in developing it, and the significance of their beliefs for the way that they will teach different subjects. At the same time, there needs to be an examination of the espoused and enacted epistemologies of university tutors: where there is a verbal commitment to developing critical reasoning, and a practice of providing demonstration lessons with ‘handouts’, knowledge may always be seen as a commodity. It may be that locating ‘training’ in the classroom would address these issues, since, if retained, university ITE departments may have a different role: that of linking theory and practice in situ.
8.2.3 Developing the research culture through partnership

Chapters 2 and 7 examined in depth the link between teaching practice and creation of a teaching identity (for example, Smith, 2005; Maynard, 2000; Hayes, 2000; Campbell & Kane, 1998; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Kagan, 1992; Calderhead & Robson, 1991). Although this is a crucial factor in becoming a critically reflective practitioner who uses talk to become a concept builder rather than a curriculum manager (Twiselton, 2006), this project has demonstrated that students are able to engage at a deeper level when a university tutor takes on a different role than ‘TP supervisor’. Changing this role, or increasing the number of students able to engage in this type of reflective activity, calls for a more creative use of time and funding, given the pressure on tutor time, and increasing devolvement to schools. Although the actual experience of ‘being there’ is difficult to replicate, observations and reflective feedback might be achieved through the use of webcams and on-line dialogue. Widening the number of participants would provide richer data, and possibly uncover an even wider set of factors influencing the way in which student teachers are empowered to transcend (or otherwise) reductive IRF exchanges, and go on to promote more hesitant, thinking, dialogue.

A limitation of this research project was that it only examined in any detail the practice in nine classrooms. A productive way of managing data collection and reflection might be to develop different partnerships with schools through joint action research projects. These might enable a wider school focus as teachers and students worked together to investigate, and improve, the use of cognitively stimulating talk. The recent growth of class based action research, in particular the M.TL (Masters in Teaching and Learning), has focused on the practice of qualified teachers, rather than teacher and student working in partnership. A number of university departments, including my own, have attempted to embed such projects in course programmes in 3 and 4 year teaching qualifications (such as the B.Ed. Bachelor of Education); prior experience as a teacher educator and researcher suggests, unfortunately, that the pragmatics of classroom management and school activity regularly disrupt the best-intentioned projects, and student teachers are often left to conduct, and evaluate, the research data themselves. It is suggested, however, that the process of ‘live’ data capture, and later reflection, is a valuable way of developing practice, and should not be dismissed as unworkable.
Any suggestions regarding the development of a more workable use of video reflection need to begin with an acknowledgement by school leaders and practitioners that, as the research indicated, VSRD is a powerful tool for self-improvement. Having a clear focus on what needs to be examined, taking control of the video, leaving time before viewing, and, more importantly, having a knowledgeable ‘other’ as a non-judgmental partner in the enterprise might redirect students’ (and teachers’) focus from compliance to deeper engagement with practice. The experience gained through this project suggests that pragmatic details such as familiarity with the video equipment, using it as a regular part of practice, and ensuring that there is an appropriate space in which to record and discuss sessions, play a more significant part in opening a dialogic space than might have been imagined. Dialogue about dialogue, using video data, as several of the students commented, can be affirming; can provide an opportunity to see in practice what is being suggested, and can prove surprising insights into one’s own teaching. As Demelza remarked, she was “totally shocked” when she realized that she automatically repeated what the children said. Without VSRD, this might have become an embedded feature of her teaching repertoire.

8.2.4 Examining ‘utterances’

This research focused specifically on beginning teachers as they considered the purpose and underpinning rationale for dialogic talk, and engaged with setting up the conditions in which this might happen. Working in partnership with their class teacher, once a rationale for developing more equal patterns of talk, and the ethos in which children felt able to venture tentative thoughts, had been established, it might be possible to move on and focus directly on the actual ‘episodes’ of speech. Joint reflection on videoed verbal exchanges might develop practitioners’ clarity about the appropriacy of different ways of managing and promoting dialogue, each closely matched to the purpose: for example, exploratory talk in small group problem-solving; presentational talk as a means of summing up learning; dialogic talk to make thinking explicit, and to allow children to learn by exploring differences in that thinking. The research indicated that students had little idea of how much of the talk role they occupied, even after viewing the recorded material, until a word count was conducted. Only then were they able to examine why they talked
so much. Returning to the close examination of dialogue in much the way that Brice Heath (1973) pioneered in America might be more effective in allowing experienced teachers to see the way in which they close down, or open up, talk.

8.2.5 Sustaining innovation

It cannot be claimed with any degree of confidence that the research participants managed innovation, although they engaged with developing children’s talk to a greater degree than students previously observed on practice, and were able to discuss it (mostly) at a surprisingly theoretical level. It would be of particular benefit to ensure that as they became newly qualified teachers, they could continue this focus, since critical reflection on innovation is crucial to sustained change (Senge et al., 2000; Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008; Sinatra & Pintrich, 2003). This might take the form of support networks; retaining contact with the university tutor in a longitudinal study; attending university sessions to engage in dialogue with current student teachers. What is clear is that this particular innovation did not appear to have reached schools, despite being enshrined in curriculum documentation, and without a continuing focus upon it, this may well disappear from the new teachers’ pedagogic repertoire. It might, therefore, be productive to engage with LAs (Local Authorities) to establish the extent to which they had provided, or were intending to provide, curriculum development for schools. Although a joint training programme might be set up between the authority and university, education policy decisions impact particularly on the diaries and training schedules of advisers and literacy consultants. With the recent, and continuing, focus on early reading, and standards of basic literacy, it is doubtful if dialogic talk would be considered a suitable candidate for demonstrating ‘impact’ and improvement in reading and writing test results.

8.3 Implications for practice

This section explores possibilities for improving practice, both within primary classrooms, and university ITE departments. It builds on the preceding section’s suggestions for further research, and urges practitioners in both settings to look beyond targets, a mandated curriculum and traditional patterns of ‘delivery’. It debates what might be
changed to ensure a more embedded, and purposeful, use of dialogue, suggesting that at the moment, patterns of classroom talk are simply being replicated from one cohort of newly qualified teachers to the next.

8.3.1 Practice in primary classrooms

Although it is not possible to state categorically that the management of talk for learning in all primary classrooms has remained remarkably static for the last 35 years, both the wealth of literature examined, and the data from the participants, indicates this is broadly the case. It was, perhaps, unsurprising that none of the students had heard of ‘interactive teaching’, although it might have been expected that schools were still following this as a principle of literacy teaching. However, none of the 100 teachers connected directly, or indirectly, with this study claimed to have heard of dialogic teaching, which suggests they have become distanced from curriculum documentation, and that any training schools have received since the inception of the Primary National Strategy for Literacy (2006) has been heavily focused on phonics and the teaching of early reading, and targeted at KS1. Although many schools may say that talk is ‘vital’ and has ‘always been valued’, without recognition that interactions between staff and children are sometimes not particularly rich - where closed, disputational or low-level talk is evident, or presentational talk is mistaken for cognitively challenging dialogue – classroom exchanges may remain in the close charge of the teacher.

A number of schools in North Yorkshire and Barking and Dagenham have recently engaged in dialogic talk projects with Alexander (2003, 2005) with the stated aim of using dialogue to ‘boost’ Level 4+ results English in Mathematics. Although the projects foreground the place of talk in raising standards, they do not appear to focus on developing cognitively challenging dialogue as an aim in itself, as promoted by Wegerif (2009) and Lefstein (2010), or to connect it with the wider purpose of education beyond league tables. If classroom dialogue is to change, and top-down curriculum change has not achieved this, then we need to look at school management. To achieve a deep and lasting change in talk routines, schools have to be convinced of its value. The head in particular needs to understand that when the quality of teacher management of dialogue
is improved, and children are taught how to engage in exploratory and dialogic talk, the resulting benefits impact firstly on children's confidence, and secondly on wider learning. Teachers need to be encouraged to be far more reflective and develop new sensitivities concerning children's talk — valuing silence, for example, as a time of reflection; encouraging a positive 'risk-taking' culture and helping children understand the value of their questioning skills. The literature of school improvement (for example, Fullan, 1999) talks of ‘reculturing’ schools through transformational leadership which involves communicating goals, sharing decision-making, creating/articulating school vision and supporting staff. Through involving heads, experienced teachers and student teachers in action research with university tutors, there may be an opportunity to develop the highest level of Maynard and Furlong's (1994) three tier model of mentoring: reflection where students learn by critically thinking, and, in co-inquiry with the mentor, develop a deeper understanding of the process of teaching and learning. Where this was the case, there would be less of a 'disconnect' between theory and practice.

8.3.2 Practice in university

The discussion chapter drew attention to the creation of learner-centred environments (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000) and the perceived disconnect between university and classroom (See; Borko and Putnam, 1996; Calderhead, 1991; Calderhead and Robson, 1991; Moore and Ash, 2002). If student teachers are expected to become dialogic practitioners, they need to ‘see what it looks like’, and experience it in a social constructivist context through tutors’ active encouragement and explicit modelling (see, for example, Bransford et al., 1999; Massengill-Shaw et al. 2008; Wells and Claxton, 2002). Rather than continuing to deliver ‘instruction’ about teaching practice through whole cohort lectures, it would be beneficial to create ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In order to achieve this, universities need to collaborate with practitioners to establish more dialogic conditions in which students could discuss and develop explicit connections between learning experiences, prior understanding and the development of professional knowledge. In a climate where students may only see the university tutor in discussion with the mentor in an evaluative/judgmental role, involving school-based
mentors in discussing the use of dialogue within the university may serve to remove an implicit divide between theory/practice.

If a shift in understanding is more likely to occur through firmly linking and connecting theory to practice (Muijs & Reynolds, 2002; Milner 2005) then universities must look on partner schools as partners, not sites where correctly taught concepts are subject to pragmatic change, and for schools not to regard universities as ‘academic’ (i.e. theoretical, and unconnected with the ‘real world’). Where there is a closer connection between the teaching of theoretical perspectives and the site of practice itself, the classroom, there is a greater likelihood of embedded change.

8.4 Recommendations for Future policy

The concluding section of this chapter examines the implications for future policy, both for Initial Teacher Education, and for the teaching of literacy in general. As Pring (2001) posits, in an era when policy and practice are tightly controlled by government, it is hard to sustain democratic values, and in a ministerial drive to look for ‘what works’ to influence education policy, interpretive research cannot offer the certainty of randomised controlled trials. Nevertheless, the weight of evidence underpinning this thesis suggests that policy has, as yet, had little influence on the way in which teachers conceptualise and enact ‘talk’, regardless of whether we refer to it as discourse, discussion, dialogue, question-and-answer, dialogic or exploratory. If these routines are to change, then policy has to change at the two levels mentioned above: that concerned with ITE and that relating to schools.

8.4.1 Talking the talk at university

It was clear when Lord Adonis (2001) informed universities “we have imposed a new national curriculum for ITT…which all providers must follow” (p.14) that responsibility for deciding what should be taught to student teachers had moved firmly to central control. Informed professional judgement was to be replaced by political compliance, and it is unfortunate that universities have been forced to operate in just such a culture of
compliance, monitored (or policed) by the DfES/DCSF, Ofsted and the TTA/TDA. It is to be hoped, however, that education policy, in the light of recent rebranding from Initial Teacher Training, to Initial Teacher Education, will recognise the significant difference between the two. ‘Training’ implies an instrumental, technocratic, knowledge-transfer model of learning; a culture of ‘certainty’ which addresses FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) in which student teachers are told what to do when a child fails to answer a question; deviates from the objective; questions the teacher. ‘Education’ implies a wider, less certain, more investigative approach in which all concerned engage in a quest for better understanding, often through dialogue and research, and answers frequently begin with ‘it depends’. It must be acknowledged, however, that this seems unlikely,

Policy, therefore, needs to acknowledge that ITE departments have a role in challenging established practice, and attempting to bring an end to the oppositional discourse of teaching/learning and child/curriculum. Pedagogy is currently subservient to curriculum, but as Alexander (2008) suggests, pedagogy needs to be connected with culture, social structure and human agency, if it is to create meaning. Enshrined within policy should be an understanding that teaching within universities is informed by research; that research need not comprise randomized control tests to be informative and useful; that those working with student teachers are generally better informed about teaching strategies and approaches than policy makers, and as such, should be given more freedom to develop a curriculum which places talk for learning at its heart. Secondly, it needs to acknowledge the importance of extra funding to support collaborative action research projects to bring the university classroom and the school classroom closer together. If practice is to change, we cannot afford to see an even wider divide between sites of learning, and a disconnect between curriculum, culture and society.

8.4.2 Walking the walk in school

The ideological stance adopted by the DfEE (1998a) positioned literacy as a means of developing a modern workforce requiring little remedial provision, and, whilst acknowledging that the important skills of reading and writing involve speaking and listening, oracy was not given the centrality it deserved within curriculum documentation:
Wilkinson (1965) may have continued to call this a case of shameful neglect. Even with the advent of the Primary National Strategy (Excellence and Enjoyment) in 2003, it became clear that the excellence would be provided by the 3Rs (that is, not discussion), and the ‘enjoyment’ by everything else. Schools were urged to “take control of their curriculum and be innovative” (DfES, 2003, para 2.8), but cautioned that “testing, targets and performance tables are here to stay” (Downing Street, 2003). This desire, on the part of the government, to be seen to be offering freedom, whilst retaining tight control, has also led to a culture of compliance in schools. According to Alexander (2008), and what seems evident from the body of research into classroom dialogue is that classroom practice, below structural level, has not changed significantly (that is, at the deeper levels of discourse which develop and extend cognition). As the most prolific writer on the subject of dialogic teaching, Alexander (2006) cautions that even with the belated inclusion of dialogic talk in the Primary Framework for literacy (DfES, 2006) both the DfES and QCA “had missed the point pretty spectacularly” (p.18) by scattering references to ‘dialogue’ through the document, then introducing the problematic reference to “using the techniques of dialogic talk” in Y6, whilst, in the glossary, conflating it with formal language and Standard English.

To remedy this culture of compliance, and address the issue of developing talk for learning, there needs to be a return to the principles of the National Oracy Project (1992) and ‘Thinking Voices’. This innovative project urged the importance of evaluating school policy and practice, particularly with respect to “transforming paper policy into…one that impacts on teaching and learning” (Corden, 2000, p.44). As Norman (1990) urged:

*If talk is to be valued as a tool for learning, and a means of communication of educational worth equal to reading and writing, its status may have to be improved in the eyes of everyone concerned with the children and the school. (p.13)*

It is apparent that there needs to be an understanding at ministerial level that, twenty years on, there is now a well-established scholarship of cognitively-orientated language use in the classroom, and that a deficit approach to inspection, with its attendant disaffection and anxiety, is more likely to result in low-level instrumental teaching, than “discursive, interactive…high quality oral work” (DfEE, 1998a, 8). In partnership with
university departments of Initial Teacher Education, and the Local Authority, schools might be persuaded to look at the value of uniting classroom research, and informed guidance, and to be ‘permitted’ to write their own policies: ones which took more account of the issues the NOP identified as key to promoting talk for learning, namely: organization, climate, resources, pupil involvement, discipline, acknowledgement of the value of talk, and assessment (Corden, 2000). In acknowledging that there is more than one kind of knowledge, and that it cannot be neatly labeled, to be effective, an English/language/literacy policy needs to encompass all sorts of knowledge, and suggest the ways in which ‘talk’ can be central to dynamic and cognitively stimulating literacy learning.

According to ‘The Case for Change’ (DfE, 2010b), the government’s theoretical research base designed to support the revisions proposed by the White Paper (DfE, 2010a) teachers “develop the majority of their skills during their first years of training and practice” (para 25). In going on to argue that 33% of primary postgraduates view their training as over-theoretical, they appear to suggest that teaching skills are unconnected with theory; clearly something that is best learned ‘on the job’ in a craft-based profession. However, two of the features they associate with the type of professional development which leads to raised attainment, can be argued to link strongly with joint reflective partnerships with universities. The use of “external expertise linked to school-based activities”, and “processes to encourage, extend and structure professional dialogue” (Para 32) offer an opportunity to engage in joint reflective dialogue focused on improving the use of classroom talk. As acknowledged in the methodology, it was not possible, or desirable, to maintain the role of supervisor and research partner; if responsibility to assessing progress towards the QTS Standards was transferred to the National College for School Leadership, as suggested, university tutors might be able to adopt a more dialogic role, focused on joint meaning-making in the context of improving classroom practice.
Chapter 9: Endnote

This thesis began with a personal reflection on my own experiences as I ‘passed through’ the English primary education system: an articulate child, denied the opportunity to engage in cognitively stimulating dialogue, condemned to be labeled ‘fussy’, and left with a deeply embedded feeling that to volunteer an opinion, or to question, was akin to ‘showing off’. It also discussed my attempts to create dialogic classrooms, freely acknowledging that this was all done on instinct, and that the pupils in my care may well have felt empowered to speak despite, rather than because of, my pedagogic approaches. It went on to explain that, as a teacher educator, my aim was to try to establish environments, in the widest sense, where questioning (by the learner), articulating emerging understandings (or puzzlement), and thinking talk was not only allowed, but positively encouraged.

Having formed my research question which sought to tease out, as far as possible, the factors which enable student teachers to promote dialogic talk, it became apparent that this was part of a wider puzzle. Given successive waves of in-service training programmes; directives to elevate the status of talk in the curriculum, and attempts to embed social constructivist approaches to learning within teacher education programmes, why have patterns of classroom talk remained essentially unchanged? Noting that Barnes (1976), had also questioned who has decided that patterns of talk are how they are, and how teachers and children learn them, I hoped that my central research question might also address these wider issues.

What seems evident is that it is hard for teachers to move away from established teaching routines; particularly the question-and-answer ‘scripts’, which continue to hold sway in primary classrooms. These appear synonymous in the minds of practitioners and student teachers with the best teaching and learning, and recently, are justified with references to assessment for learning (AfL), students frequently writing on lesson plans “I will ask questions”; or even, “I will ask the more able children open questions”. It may well
be that a lingering backlash from the Plowden Report which frowned upon ‘teaching by telling’, has been embedded as a type of cultural folk-myth, and contributed to the preponderance of lower order check-up questions, and presentational talk. Evidence has also suggested that an attempt to shift pedagogy to a focus on ‘interactive’ teaching has played a part in reinforcing bidding for attention. But it must also be questioned how far the emphasis placed on higher order questioning by universities and Local Authority literacy training, has inadvertently reinforced question-and-answer as the staple of teaching. What seems evident is that teachers cannot simply be told to ask less questions; attempts to scaffold student teachers’ understanding of how to ask better ones, or why they should refrain from answering them themselves, does not appear to have shifted practice to any significant degree, if the literature, and my research data, is to be heeded as ‘typical’.

In asking what needs to be done, if more dialogic classrooms are to be created, I believe that student teachers need to begin their career with a ‘repertoire’ of talk; not merely a range of pedagogic strategies for eliciting and developing understanding, but also the confidence to apply them at the right time and in the right situation. This raises the question of the university’s role in educating new entrants to the profession; until it has resolved the dilemma of whether it is an educator, a trainer, or a QA inspector, and if it is process or product that matters, students will continue to encounter an eclectic mix of teaching which, it must be said, is sometimes selected for the most pragmatic, rather than pedagogic, of reasons. The teaching repertoire encompasses ‘demonstration’ sessions (I use this term advisedly); whole cohort PowerPoint lectures (ironically, possibly on using more exploratory or dialogic approaches in the classroom); subject knowledge audits and checks, and more ‘difficult’ and ‘ephemeral’ seminars with a small number of tutors where they are required to engage, challenge, think and discuss. For many, a background of ‘A’ levels which has distilled complex concepts into a series of simplistic bullet points to be memorised and regurgitated, the requirement to have a personal opinion – and to express it – is a challenge. For those whose memories of talk are of seeing it used as a means of control, of showing you can parrot the teacher’s view, of being afraid to raise your hand, ‘dialogic’ involvement must surely be a thing to be endured, then left in a folder of course notes. I have attended course committee meetings where concerns are
raised that some ‘mature’ students are dominating discussion, asking too many questions, slowing the pace of tutor ‘delivery’. Sessions containing handouts, checklists to be used on placement and key names, dates and references to documents, which can be found on ‘Learning Space’, are highly regarded. This appears to represent a lifelong attitude to learning, not for all students, but for many.

Much of the literature has suggested that a top-down mandated literacy curriculum was doomed to failure. Whilst my personal opinion is that the NLS (1998a) suffered because of the complete failure of its architects to show the underpinning theoretical concepts, I believe it had many strengths, for example, the interdependence of reading and writing, the evident progression, and the shift in focus in many classrooms from behaviour to curriculum. Despite the weight of evidence describing it as ‘restrictive’ and ‘authoritarian’, a thinking teacher, or one with experience of the NOP (1992), could creatively mediate the structure to produce units of work thoroughly grounded in rich literature and enriched by drama, discussion and dialogue. It is unfortunate that, as a NLS Literacy Consultant at the time, I, and my colleagues across the country, were even then being instructed to focus our training, and work in schools, on ‘word level work’ (phonics); the national director explaining that it was our place to ensure that the correct components of the literacy hour were being taught, and for the required amount of time, and in the correct order. There was to be no ‘deviation’, and the metaphor was that we were ‘holding the line’ – presumably against insurgents! Here was an ideal opportunity to use the time and money ring fenced for literacy training to consider the metaskill, and essential nature, of talk as a means of concept building, cognitive development, and pupil engagement. Unfortunately, most of the resources were used on instrumental features such as planning and organization, and the opportunity was lost.

Having spent over three years researching, and gathering data on classroom interactions, it would be deeply personally satisfying to be able to reflect that curriculum change has at last effectively foregrounded dialogue; that practitioners are using and applying a range of talk strategies in their classrooms; and that student teachers are able to discuss their own practice jointly with mentors to consider how to build concepts through dialogue. Unfortunately, as I write, a new governmental White Paper on education is urging a
renewed focus on discipline, school blazers, and ever more rigorous and systematic phonics teaching, suggesting that student teachers should be ‘trained’ in excellent schools, rather than at university. An apprenticeship model of teaching will certainly have strong points, for example, an on-the-job understanding of how to apply classroom discipline, but as to how far ‘expert’ schools will be able to articulate their practice, or even be relied upon to model a range of talk strategies, with a clear rationale for how and why each were applied – I have many reservations. However, to end on a positive note, university tutors across the country will continue to challenge students to think; they will continue to provide teaching practice feedback which suggests practical strategies for developing talk for learning, and they will strive to create rich learning environments. It is to be hoped that policy makers assist them in this by being ‘advised’ that IRF routines, and rote learning, are not the best way to develop learning.
### Appendix 1 Group questionnaire Cycle 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Collaborative group work is hard to organise</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Collaborative group work offers opportunities for children to build knowledge together</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Children cannot work productively in a group, unless an adult is with them</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I find it exciting that children can ask unexpected questions during group work.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>If you negotiate rules for talk with children, they collaborate more effectively in groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>You can’t assess work if children have done it collaboratively.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Children waste time chatting about social things if you ask them to discuss in a group</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Children do not focus on the task if you allow them to talk together in a group.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>In group work, the teacher should try to let children take a lead in discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The teacher acts as an effective discourse guide when she ensures all children in the group have a fair turn to answer her questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>There isn’t enough time to allow children to think of their own questions in group work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>It’s easy to lose control of the class if you are not teaching all of them from the front.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Using an initiation, response, feedback format for structuring group discussion enables the teacher to ensure children develop and expand their ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>By working and talking collaboratively, children can reach higher levels of understanding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The teacher’s main role in group work is to ask questions to check up on knowledge</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Group work offers opportunities to assess the process of learning, rather than the outcome.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The teachers should always control the talk when working with groups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>We develop understanding through discussion with others</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Research suggests group work has often been used to maintain children’s attention and classroom control, rather than to exploit its social pedagogic potential</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Children work best in silence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 Entry Questionnaire Cycle 2

I would be very grateful if you would complete this brief questionnaire which forms part of my wider research. Part 1 asks for some details about you. Part 2 seeks your current opinions on a range of educational issues. There are no right or wrong answers, and nothing that I ‘want’ you to say, so please be as honest as possible! All data will be kept anonymous.

Part 1: about you:
Gender
Group
Degree subject
Age (24 or under/25 or older)
Prior paid employment in the classroom yes/no

Part 2: your views:
What aspect of English did you most enjoy at primary school?

What is your current view of the role of talk in the classroom?

How would you respond to the statement that a quiet classroom is a learning classroom?

What do you feel is the teacher’s main role when managing talk in groups?

How important do you feel it is for the teacher to impart their knowledge to children?
Appendix 3 Exit Questionnaire Cycle 2

I would be very grateful if you would complete this brief questionnaire which forms part of my wider research. Part 1 asks for some details about you. Part 2 seeks your current opinions on a range of educational issues. There are no right or wrong answers, and nothing that I ‘want’ you to say, so please be as honest as possible! All data will be kept anonymous.

Part 1: about you:
Gender_____________________________________________
Group _____________________________________________
Degree subject _____________________________________
Age (24 or under/25 or older) __________________________
Prior paid employment in the classroom yes/no _________

Part 2: your views:
Reflect back to your own primary education: what are your memories of the way talk was used?

What is your current view of the role of talk in the classroom?

How would you respond to the statement that a quiet classroom is a learning classroom?

What do you feel is the teacher’s main role when managing talk in groups?

How important do you feel it is for the teacher to impart their knowledge to children?

What do you understand by ‘dialogic talk’?

Have you used dialogic talk in your teaching? (yes/no)
12a. If ‘no’, why?

12b. If ‘yes’, how?
Appendix 4: Talk Histories: Reflective Writing Cycle 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talk Histories: Liteacy Biography 3: Speaking and Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This task requires you to think about the way that talk was used in your own primary education. Do you remember your classroom as a place of debate and collaborative discussion? Who mainly led the talk? Who asked questions? Were you encouraged to question and challenge each other? How did you feel about putting your hand up? Read the following extract from a children’s book. Write a short reflection about your memories of the way talk was used in your primary school.

Reuben wasn’t like Mrs. Mayberry. He wasn’t like a normal teacher who just told you things and then gave you tests. He asked us things instead of telling. He was always asking, ‘How does that feel? What do you imagine when you do that?’

Every day, Reuben started by asking us if we had any new ideas or thoughts. It made me feel that my ideas were important. It made me want to keep thinking things up.

From: The Slightly True Story of Cedar B. Hartley by Martine Murray. Scholastic Press.
Appendix 5: Characteristics of Concern

Adapted from Sprint Scales of concern, Moyles et al, 2003)

A. Conceptual understanding of dialogic talk

In your view, what is dialogic talk?

Interview prompts:
Characteristics?
Definitions?
Wider examples of dialogic talk?

What do you consider to be its aims and purposes?

Interview prompts:
Own views/others?
School issues
Policy/teaching issues?

B. Stages of concern

What is your attitude to dialogic talk?

Interview prompts
Feelings about it

Do you have concerns about promoting or facilitating dialogic talk?

Interview prompts
Implications
### C Levels of use

How knowledgeable do you feel about dialogic talk?

How far do you employ strategies for promoting dialogic talk at the moment?

**Interview prompts:**
- *Literacy hour use?*
- *Other curriculum areas?*
- *Future intentions?*

What influences your promotion of dialogic talk?

**Interview prompts:**
- *Class management?*
- *Impact on pupils?*
- *Own knowledge/limitations?*
- *Collaboration with others?*

Has your promotion of dialogic talk changed since your first TP?

**Interview prompts:**
- *In what ways?*
- *What prompted changes?*

In your view, what, if any, are useful alternatives to dialogic talk?

Do you have any other comments to make?
D. Characteristics of concern about dialogic talk

Lack of information, e.g. I would like to know how my teaching is supposed to promote this.

Conflicting demands, e.g. I am not sure how I am supposed to get through everything and give them time to talk things through.

Professional adoption, e.g. I would like to know more about ways to promote dialogic talk.

Collegial development, e.g. I would like to work with other teachers so we could develop this approach through the school.

Critical concern, e.g. I would like to change the approach to dialogic talk based on my experience of working with these children.

E. Levels of use

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>non-use</td>
<td>Not using, or intending to use, the innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>orientation</td>
<td>Taking steps to find out about the innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>preparation</td>
<td>Preparing for first use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>mechanical use</td>
<td>Initial attempts to master use of innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1Va</td>
<td>routine</td>
<td>Stabilised use of intervention with little change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Critical threshold point where innovation is no longer bolted-on

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1Vb</td>
<td>refinement</td>
<td>Variation in use to increase effect on children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>integration</td>
<td>Working with others to increase benefits to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1</td>
<td>renewal</td>
<td>Re-evaluating use and seeking modifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6 Reflective Framework Dialogue

The video tape will be used as a focus for the reflective dialogue with Annie. Before the dialogue you need to view the video, and consider which sections you think represent examples of dialogic talk. With Annie, you will play that section of video and stop the tape at points of significance or interest for you.

The purpose of the reflective dialogue is to explore your intentions, assumptions and experience of the lesson. It is important to understand that the process aims to challenge your knowledge, views and actions with the intention that you can develop your practice in promoting dialogic talk. In doing this, I hope in partnership to develop both our understandings of what it means to promote ‘dialogic talk’.

Towards a reflective dialogue
The purposes of the dialogue are:
- To surface your own personal knowledge and theories about ‘dialogic talk’
- To highlight the assumptions you make in your thinking and teaching
- To help you critique your thinking and practice
- To provide a model of reflective practice
- To encourage you to think reflectively about dialogic talk
- To develop your awareness of the pupils and yourself as a practitioner

Below is a framework for reflection that will be used in the reflective dialogue. The intention is that you will direct the focus of questioning about the video extract. I will support you in this, and draw attention to further questions or themes that might be applicable.

Finally, the two partners in the reflective dialogue will agree a number of action points to work on until the next dialogue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentions and purposes</th>
<th>Technical reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is designed to help you explore your intentions and criteria for effectiveness. Change is a process influenced by experience, plus your current school and classroom.</td>
<td>This is about identifying your educational basis for an intention, and providing a reason for action. It aims to try to assess how effective your practice is in attaining a defined educational goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were your intentions/aims in using this strategy?</td>
<td>What were you aiming for here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far were you successful?</td>
<td>Why did you choose this strategy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you come to this view?</td>
<td>Can you break down what you were doing into elements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you expect the pupils’ response to be?</td>
<td>How might different children respond to this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the school context (policy/time of year) influence you?</td>
<td>How did your prior experience of the class influence your actions/thinking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How might this be improved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What kind of learning was promoted?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-awareness</th>
<th>Perceptual awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is to focus you on a moment of your teaching. What do you sense about yourself – physical feelings, emotions, thinking and attitudes ‘in action’</td>
<td>This is to help you focus on perceptions, not thinking. Where is the focus of your attention? What is noticed from the video that wasn’t noticed ‘live’? What might you focus on next time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were you feeling in this moment?</td>
<td>What were you aware of in the classroom at this time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the roots of this feeling?</td>
<td>Where was your attention focussed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you learn from viewing yourself?</td>
<td>What do you notice now that you weren’t aware of at the time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What alternative foci might there be?</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical reflection</th>
<th>Critical reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The aim here is to explain and clarify the aims and values which underlie your practice. This seeks other possible claims, perspectives and ways of enacting practice.</td>
<td>This takes account of social, cultural and political forces which impact (unknowingly) on your practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What assumptions are you making about teaching and learning?</td>
<td>What ethical/moral choices have you made here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are these based on (personal experience, teacher training, other professionals, school culture, research)?</td>
<td>What wider historical/socio-political, cultural forces or constraints might apply?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does ‘being professional’ mean to you?</td>
<td>How are pupils affected by your actions beyond the classroom/in subtle ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your practice offer equality of opportunity?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As I result of the dialogue, I have decided to develop my practice in promoting dialogic talk in the following ways:
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