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

Submitted by Anne Fisher to the University of Exeter

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Signature:

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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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