

The Fundamentals of Educational Dialogue - Week 1 video transcript

Introduction:

This week we are going to focus on: (1) the relationship between thinking and dialogue, (2) the difference between classroom talk and dialogue, (3) the difference between oracy and dialogue.

The relationship between thinking and dialogue:

'Thinking and discourse are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind itself without a spoken sound' (Plato)

Plato seems to be saying here that thinking happens through language. Not everyone will agree with Plato, but it is hard to argue with the idea that at least one way that thinking happens is through an internal dialogue that we are having. If we spend some time thinking about how we think, we can see that dialogue is part of the process.

A requirement for receiving a certificate of completion for the course is submitting a quality reflective journal of 2000 words or more. We have included a template for this journal in the resources section for each week. The reflective journal template for week 1 is below and while you are completing the readings for this week and exploring the Edudialogue.org website, we would like you to use this reflective journal.

To begin with you can write out an account or timeline of one thinking process you have had. How did you think about a problem? Ask yourself, was language involved? Were you in dialogue with someone?

The difference between classroom talk and dialogue:

"Dialogue is more than 'just talk'. It involves teachers and learners commenting and cumulatively building on each other's ideas, posing questions and constructing interpretations together." (Robin Alexander)

The work on educational dialogue has been generated by the unequal nature of classroom talk. In many classrooms the teacher speaks for 80% of the time. When learners do speak it is typically in an IRE / F exchange (Initiation, response, evaluation or feedback). Here is an example:

- The teacher asks a question
- Learners bid to answer by raising their hands

- The teacher picks one learner
- The learner answers
- The teacher either gives an evaluation or offers feedback on the learner's answer

This kind of exchange means that many learners never actually speak in class.

In contrast to this kind of classroom exchange, here are some key features of educational dialogue:

- Dialogue means being able to articulate ideas seen from someone else's perspective
- It is characterised by chains of primarily open questions and answers.
- It may be sustained over the course of a single lesson or across lessons.
- It builds on the idea of 'exploratory talk', where learners explore different perspectives, construct shared knowledge, make reasoning explicit and are willing to change their minds
- And lastly, it has a critical dimension: learners respectfully critique their own and others' ideas.

There are related links below to look at these key features in more detail and one of the activities for you to complete this week is to spend some time thinking through your classroom or setting: How far is your practice dialogic? Which of these features of educational dialogue are easy to identify in your classroom and in your planning? Write down your initial thoughts about this in your reflective journal template for this week.

The difference between Oracy and Dialogue:

We are fully supportive of work that is being done to teach oracy skills and although we are excited about oracy, our focus in this course is dialogue. The two are related, but the distinction is that oracy is about teaching learners how to express their ideas confidently and coherently. Although this is an important skill for quality dialogue, educational dialogue is *also* about responding to ideas and learning through interaction with others. Educational dialogue is dependent on relationships and fostering an openness and criticality towards others' ideas. As we go through this course, we hope that learner's oracy skills will also develop as you begin to work to improve the quality of the educational dialogue in your classrooms.

Please scroll down to access the readings and resources assigned for this week as well the activities and discussion forum posts for you to complete. We are looking forward to seeing you in week 2 where we have invited Robin Alexander to talk to you about his work on taking a dialogic stance.