

## The Fundamentals of Educational Dialogue – Week 2 video transcript

Welcome to Week 2 of the course. This week we will be looking at the work of Professor Robin Alexander. We begin with a quote from his latest book for teachers, *A Dialogic Teaching Companion*: “Dialogic teaching also celebrates talk for talk’s sake, relishing language in all its forms and rejoicing in articulation, expression, communication, discussion and argumentation. And in so doing, dialogue takes us beyond classroom transactions into the realm of ideas and values, for dialogue is as much a stance or outlook - on human relationships, knowledge, education, culture and society - as it is a pedagogical technique.” (Robin Alexander, *A Dialogic Teaching Companion* 2020, p.1)

What does Alexander mean by ‘Dialogic Stance’? Dialogue is not something we ‘do’; it’s actually more to do with how we, as human beings ‘are’. For Alexander and other theorists, if we recognise the ‘dialogic’ nature of how we as humans exist, then we would view education differently. Taking a dialogic stance means prioritizing our relationships in classrooms and recognising that education is an exchange between people. In this exchange, learners have as much, if not more, of a role to play than educators. Taking this stance can transform our classroom and school cultures. Alexander has also said that ‘enacting dialogue’ should be a core educational aim. Educators should help learners grasp that learning is an interactive process and that understanding builds through joint activity between teacher and learner, and among learners in collaboration. By developing this understanding, we support the development of learners’ increasing sense of responsibility for what and how they learn. We help learners to recognise that knowledge is not only transmitted but also negotiated and re-created; and that each of us in the end makes our own sense out of the knowledge we have learnt, in both a personal, and a collective way. As educators who take a dialogic stance, we make our learners aware that dialogue is central: it is between ourselves and others, between our personal and our collective knowledge, between present and past, between different ways of making sense of the world.

Alexander’s six principles for Dialogic Teaching can help educators to take a dialogic stance and lay a foundation for enacting high quality classroom dialogue. The first principle is that our learning spaces must be **Collective**. The classroom is a site of joint learning and inquiry, and, whether in groups or as a class, students and teachers must be willing and able to address learning tasks together.

The second principle is that our educational ethos must be **Supportive**. Students should feel able to express ideas freely, without risk of embarrassment over

contributions that are hesitant or tentative, or that might be judged 'wrong', and they help each other to reach common understandings. This can be done through the introduction of ground rules, which we will talk about in week 3 of this course.

Alexander's third principle is that our educational approach should be **Reciprocal**. It is important that learners listen to each other, share ideas, ask questions and consider alternative viewpoints. It is up to educators to ensure that learners have ample opportunities to do this. Educators need to be attentive to how far this is happening in their classrooms. As we will see in week 4 of this course, classroom participation in combination with other things leads directly to learning gains. However, this is not easy to achieve. It takes a substantial amount of reflective practice and an ongoing series of small changes to create this classroom culture.

The fourth principle is that talk and engagement in the classroom is **Deliberative**. Learners discuss and seek to resolve different points of view, they present and evaluate arguments and they work towards reasoned positions and outcomes. Not only does engaging in this kind of talk develop learners' cognitive skills, Alexander argues that combined with the other principles, it supports the development of the critical skills that learners need in our 'post-truth' world.

Alexander's fifth principle is that dialogue must be **Cumulative**. Participants in the dialogue, i.e. learners and educators, build on their own and each other's contributions and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and understanding. Understanding that learning is ongoing and that there is always more to explore and find out about creates a growth mindset. Learners stop seeing learning as memorizing information to pass tests and see it as a way to cumulatively understand more about the world.

Finally, learning, and the dialogue that generates it, must be **Purposeful**. Not only should educators and learners see the purpose of being in the classroom as learning about the world, but they should also understand that they need to learn about the world in a purposeful manner. Therefore educators need to ensure that classroom dialogue, though sometimes open-ended and exploratory, is nevertheless structured with specific learning goals that support learner development over time.

You can use your Reflective Journal template for Week 2 to help you reflect on how far your classroom practice adopts these principles and what you might do to improve your dialogic stance.

Robin Alexander has identified many 'Repertoires' that help educators understand ways in which they can make their teaching more dialogic and effective. We will

look at some of them in this course, but many more can be found in his latest book 'A Dialogic Teaching Companion'. The first thing to note is that Alexander is not saying that classrooms should always be a place where learners are talking. Rather, strong dialogic teaching requires a range of practices which he calls Repertoires. The first Repertoire indicates that classrooms should have the full range of relationships and groupings that can be deployed for teaching, that is:

- Whole class
- Group (teacher-led)
- Group (student-led)
- Individual (teacher and student)
- Individual (student pairs)

Dialogic Educators will be skilled in deploying these as required to meet their learning goals. Even students working on their own can be dialogic if they understand that they are in dialogue with the ideas they are studying.

We will now look at a range of **Functions of Classroom Talk**. The range of functions that classroom talk can take is very wide. Alexander identifies:

- **Transactional talk:** where we ask, answer, instruct, inform, explain, discuss
- **Expository:** where we narrate, expound and explain, tell, explain, describe, expand
- **Interrogatory:** where we ask questions of different kinds and in diverse contexts, we may bid, ask, enquire, answer
- **Exploratory:** where we suggest, venture, speculate, soliloquise, hypothesise, probe, clarify
- **Deliberative:** where we reason, ask, argue, question, hypothesise, challenge, defend, justify, analyse, synthesise, persuade, decide
- **Imaginative:** where we contemplate and articulate what might be; we may speculate, wonder, visualise, describe, envisage, create, soliloquise
- **Expressive:** where we put thoughts into words, nuance ideas, articulate feelings and responses, we may narrate, speculate, qualify, argue, insist, wonder, exclaim
- **Evaluative:** where we deliver opinions, form and articulate judgements. We may, opine, estimate, assert, argue, judge, justify

Finally, we look at a repertoire of **types of teaching talk** that you might use in your classroom. Dialogic teaching requires the use of all of these types of talk.

- **Rote:** this involves memorizing facts, formulae, routines or texts through constant repetition.
- **Recitation:** using short teacher question/student answer sequences to recall what has previously been encountered, or to test what is presumed or required to be already known.

- **Instruction:** telling students what to do and/or how to do it.
- **Exposition:** imparting information, explaining ideas or procedures, narrating.
- **Discussion:** exchanging ideas and information, uncovering and juxtaposing viewpoints.
- **Deliberation:** weighing the merits of ideas, opinions or evidence.
- **Argumentation:** making or testing a case by reference to reasons or evidence.
- **Dialogue:** working towards common understanding through structured questioning, probed and elaborated responses, and an interactive dynamic that strives to be collective, reciprocal and supportive as well as cumulative, deliberative and purposeful.

Once you have had a look at the core readings, please use your reflective journal template to make notes and write a 300 word reflection on your current practice. You will use this reflection to compile your final reflective report that you will need to submit for your certificate of completion. Don't forget to write one post about this week's video and reading on the EduDialogue.org discussion forum *and* to respond to one other student's post. We hope that through this dialogic engagement on the discussion forum, you will strengthen your learning. Finally, do also check out the further readings and resources to support your learning, and continue to explore the amazing resources on EduDialogue.org. Next week we will be looking at the work of Neil Mercer.