

Week 2: Robin Alexander - Taking a Dialogic Stance

Course handout

This handout will support you with the core concepts for this week and includes helpful passages from related publications.

What is dialogic teaching?

"Dialogic teaching harnesses the power of talk to engage interest, stimulate thinking, advance understanding, expand ideas, and build and evaluate arguments, empowering students for lifelong learning and democratic engagement." *Alexander, R.J. (2020). A Dialogic Teaching Companion, Routledge, p.1.*

Dialogue as an educational aim

"Enacting dialogue. To help children grasp that learning is an interactive process and that understanding builds through joint activity between teacher and pupil and among pupils in collaboration, and thereby to develop pupils' increasing sense of responsibility for what and how they learn. To help children 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 meeting of knowledge both personal and collective. To advance a pedagogy in which dialogue is central: between self and others, between personal and collective knowledge, between present and past, between different ways of making sense." *Alexander, R.J. (ed) (2010). Children, their World, their Education: Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review, Routledge, pp 197-9*

Taking a dialogic stance

"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." *Alexander, R.J. (2020). A Dialogic Teaching Companion, Routledge, p.1*

Principles of dialogic teaching

These principles lay a foundation for enacting dialogue:

- **Collective.** The classroom is a site of joint learning and enquiry, and, whether in groups or as a class, students and teachers are willing and able to address learning tasks together.
- **Supportive.** Students 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.
- **Reciprocal.** Participants listen to each other, share ideas, ask questions and consider alternative viewpoints; and teachers ensure that they have ample opportunities to do so.
- **Deliberative.** Participants discuss and seek to resolve different points of view, they present and evaluate arguments and they work towards reasoned positions and outcomes.
- **Cumulative.** Participants build on their own and each other's contributions and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and understanding.
- **Purposeful.** Classroom talk, though sometimes open-ended, is nevertheless structured with specific learning goals in view.

Alexander, R.J. (2020). A Dialogic Teaching Companion, Routledge, p.131

Key repertoires

Alexander is keen to point out that taking a Dialogic Stance means moving beyond dichotomy to understanding the need for repertoires as part of an educator's toolkit. Here are some examples of repertoires that inform his Dialogic Teaching approach:

- **Relations and Grouping**
 - Whole class
 - Group (teacher-led)
 - Group (student-led)
 - Individual (teacher and student)
 - Individual (student pairs)
- **Functions of Classroom Talk:** You will note that first, talk itself serves a remarkably wide range of functions and second, that similar forms of talk

can serve different functions e.g. learners may hypothesise in an exploratory, deliberative or imaginative way.

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

Adapted from: Alexander, R.J. (2020). A Dialogic Teaching Companion, Routledge, p.143

- **Types of Teaching Talk:** Dialogic teaching requires the use of all of these types of talk:
 - **Rote:** memorising 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.⁵²
 - **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.

You may wish to explore further repertoires in Alexander, R.J. (2020). A Dialogic Teaching Companion, Routledge