

Week 5: Rupert Wegerif - Opening up a Dialogic Space for reflection and agency

Course handout

This handout will support you with the core concepts for this week through a series of quotations from Rupert Wegerif's book, (2010) *Mind Expanding: Teaching for thinking and creativity in primary education*. Open University Press.

Dialogic education:

"Dialogic education means teaching for dialogue as well as teaching through dialogue. That sounds simple - and is simple - but it also implies a profound change in how we understand education." (p.18)

Teaching thinking:

"The first lesson for anyone who wants to teach thinking to others is to make friends with ignorance. It really does not matter that we do not know the answers, what is important is that we keep asking the big questions. That way not only can we stay young and creative forever but also we can help children learn to think for themselves by constantly re-learning how to think things through again with them. For teaching thinking, the right answer to every big question is: 'I don't know, let's investigate it together'." (p.2)

Understanding thinking as dialogue:

"Bakhtin pointed out... (that) we think in dialogues where what we say or write responds to what other people have said or written so there is always more than one voice and more than one way of seeing things... human thinking is always bursting with the surprising creativity that comes from holding multiple voices together in the tension of dialogue." (p.26)

Dialogue, creativity and possibility thinking:

"The spirit of dialogic creative talk is well represented by Anna Craft's suggestion that teaching for creativity be conceptualized in terms of encouraging 'possibility thinking', an idea which includes fashioning new products as well as coming up with new ideas and finding new problems as well as solving encountered problems. Possibility thinking, she argues, is exemplified through the posing, in multiple ways, of the question 'What if?'. This relates to Guy Claxton's suggestion

that instead of teaching things as if they were simply true teachers should always raise the possibility that things could be different by saying 'might be' in place of 'is'. In practice, aspects of teaching for possibility thinking in classrooms include:

- Posing questions
- Play
- Immersion and making connections
- Being imaginative
- Innovation
- Risk taking
- Self-determination"

(p.48-49)

Teaching creative thinking through dialogue

"The most valuable type of question for developing creativity is often referred to as the 'What if . . . ?' question. 'What if's' can be applied to every area of the curriculum.

- **Literacy:** *If we make the good characters evil and the evil characters good then how would the plot of the story be affected?*
- **History:** *If you were time transported from a present-day town to a Tudor town what differences would you see?*
- **Science:** *If we add ink to the water then what do you think will happen to the flower?*

Questions for stimulating creative ideas about any topic can be grouped under the mnemonic **CREATE**:

- **C**ombine: Can you add something else to it? Can you combine purposes, ideas?
- **R**earrange: Can parts of it be moved or changed?
- **E**liminate: What could you remove or replace - in part or whole? Can it be simplified?
- **A**dapt: Can it be adapted? What else is this like? What ideas does it suggest?
- **T**ry another use: Can it be put to other uses - or given a new use if you changed one part?
- **E**xtend: What could be added - words, pictures, symbols, functions, decoration, logos?"

(p.50)

Reflection and inner dialogues

"That using words is important to thinking is obviously true but it is also true that thinking goes beyond words." (p.133)

"Words are important but insight and understanding occurs in a space beyond words and then needs to be clothed in words. How can we characterize the space beyond words where insights occur? A clue is given in the way in which open-questions and challenges often stimulate new thoughts. When Perry asks Tara, 'What do you mean?' she is stimulated to see the problem in a new way and change her mind. When the teacher... asks Alex, 'Is it really real?'... Alex is projected into deeper reflection on his experience which leads to deeper insight. In sum I think that insights occur in spaces of reflection that are opened up between voices in dialogue.

Dialogues are not always between physically embodied voices, they can be between virtual or imaginary voices. Having had the experience of being questioned by others in a dialogue, children learn to appropriate that questioning voice and can question themselves when alone. Many insights occur when we are alone; after all Archimedes was alone in his bathtub when he shouted 'Eureka!' But such insights still occur in the space of dialogue between two voices. We often refer to this as 'talking to ourselves'. But actually when we question ourselves we are taking the perspective of another person so I think of this as more like talking to the Other or perhaps this is talking to 'oneself as another'." (p.134)

Giving learners agency over their learning:

"It is seldom the case that what we learn means that we have to reject our initial view and replace it completely with a new one. Dialogic learning more often means adding to our range of possible ways of seeing the world. Dialogic learning is not a journey from A to B but a journey from A to A and B." (p.134)

"Thinking begins with the need for children to explain themselves. However as they explain themselves to someone else they also listen to their own voice as if in the position of another to themselves. This new other is like a witness to every dialogue. This sense of there being a witness... leads children to question their own explanations even if the people they are actually talking to do not... Of course

this shift of thinking into a kind of virtual 'inner' dialogue does not mean that real dialogues become less important for learning. All teachers know that having to explain something clearly to someone else can help you to understand it for yourself." (p.136)

"Reflexive dialogical thinking combines creativity, criticality and responsibility. It is characterized by the wisdom that comes from knowing that there is always an outside perspective that would see things differently and probably laugh at our theories, the playfulness that comes from valuing multiplicity and the enriched understanding that can come from seeing through many eyes at once." (p. 139) - This could be described as mind expanding.

"This process of mind expansion does not stop with the individual or with the classroom but requires that education becomes a driver towards more global dialogue and more global awareness." (p. 142)