

Camtree Digital Library



In what ways does dialogic listening impact the ability to sustain dialogue?

Author	Whittington, Lucy
Title	In what ways does dialogic listening impact the ability to sustain dialogue?
Publisher	Camtree: the Cambridge Teacher Research Exchange
Publication date	2021
Download date	2026-05-14 03:47:54
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/21

RESEARCH REPORT

In what ways does dialogic listening impact the ability to sustain dialogue?

Lucy Whittington

Central Bedfordshire; lwhittington6998@gmail.com

Abstract

Background and purpose: Prior to beginning the inquiry, I observed that pupils in my class were able to listen to the teacher but struggle with listening and sustaining dialogue with each other.

Aims: I conducted a small-scale study inquiring into how dialogic listening impacts the ability to sustain quality dialogue in the classroom.

Study design or methodology: My inquiry focused on a Year 1 class (30 children aged 5-6) with the researcher being myself, the class teacher. I carried out weekly classroom-based observations using the T-SEDA coding frameworks to analyse dialogue focusing on building on ideas, challenging each other and inviting others to build on ideas. I used this data to identify and implement strategies to improve dialogic listening in the classroom. These included implementing Talk Rules, Physical cues for listening, timetabled opportunities for discussion and a focus on language.

Findings: Based on coding over the five observation weeks, findings indicated that if pupils are given the tools and time to develop their dialogic listening then this can positively impact their ability to sustain quality dialogue with one another.

Implications for practice: The biggest change to my practice has been making time to consider how I can encourage pupil's dialogic listening in all areas of the curriculum. Although, listening in the classroom has always been an important part of my practice, I focused on how I listened to pupils. This inquiry has shifted my perspective and highlighted the importance of providing pupils with opportunities to learn how to listen to each other, co-construct ideas and take an active role in dialogue.

Keywords: listening; dialogue; T-SEDA

My context

This inquiry took place in a 3-form entry Lower School in Bedfordshire. The pupils involved in my study were in a Year 1 class (5-6 yrs old) and the inquirer was the class teacher. The class was made up of 30 pupils with an even split between genders, 2 pupils who have a Special Educational Need and 1 pupil is identified as a Pupil Premium.

My motivation for the inquiry, the focus and the inquiry question

When considering the focus of my inquiry, I reflected on the type of dialogue that already takes place in my classroom and I realised that pupils were better at listening and responding to the teacher than they were to their peers. This was clear because often responses to peers were egocentric or off topic.

I then considered the role of listening in dialogue. Bakhtin (1986.p68) suggests “Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker”. This inspired my inquiry focus as I realised that for pupils to engage in sustained dialogue with their peers they must first understand how to listen so that they can formulate responses.

Lipari (2010) suggests that you must recognise the distinction between hearing and listening and that hearing is defined by the perception and sensation of the sound whereas listening is the attention and the giving to another. I could not deny that the pupils in my class were hearing what was being said but I would challenge the likelihood of them truly listening and therefore thinking about what is being said to one another.

The Oracy Skills Framework (Mercer, Warwick & Ahmed, 2017) splits oracy into four strands of skills – physical, linguistic, cognitive and social & emotional – with the suggestion that when some of these skills are combined pupils will be engaged in high quality dialogue. Robin Alexander (2020) argues that there are several concerns with this skills framework, one being the use of the word skill “for this framework appears to follow a reductive and arguably corporate trend that during recent years has redefined much or most of the educational endeavour as marketable skill.” (Alexander R, 2020, p80). He also raises concerns about the categorization of the skills, commenting that “‘skills’ defined here as ‘social and emotional’ could equally be classified as ‘cognitive’, just as ‘audience awareness’ could be classified as ‘social and emotional’” (Alexander R, 2020, p80). I do agree that the skills could be classified in several different strands and that limiting them to a particular strand could be confusing for a student or teacher using this framework. Nevertheless, by raising the idea of the physical skill of listening, I was keen to address this in my classroom because I had not explicitly taught physical listening cues and it was evidently a missing feature within my classroom. Gaunt and Stott (2019) also suggested this would be a good place to begin “The physical markers of listening are often the easiest to teach and usually the best place to start, especially with younger students” (Gaunt, A & Stott, A. 2019, p87). In my initial self-audit I judged the statement: ‘engage students in both jointly creating and using ground rules for talk’ as ‘slightly agree’. Therefore, I wanted to explore how the introduction of these could also encourage dialogic listening and if they would affect sustained dialogue in my classroom. My inquiry question became ‘How does dialogic listening impact the ability to sustain dialogue in a Year 1 classroom?’ I then looked at the T-SEDA pack and considered which types of dialogue would require pupils to be listening to each other. I selected building on ideas, challenging and inviting others to build on ideas. These types of talk are often defined as “Exploratory Talk, that we judged to be the most educationally effective” (Littleton and Mercer, 2013, p16).

Specifically in terms of my findings, I anticipated I would find increased instances of pupils building upon each other’s ideas, challenging each other and beginning to invite others to build on ideas as this would indicate that pupils were listening dialogically and in turn sustaining dialogue.

My inquiry plan and activities

I chose to carry out a baseline observation, with a discussion question linked to previous learning so that the topic was familiar to pupils. This was audio recorded, then transcribed and coded using the T-SEDA coding template 2a. Then I wrote a reflection on the observation and identified next steps. I continued to carry out these observations in the same way at least weekly for 4 weeks and I had five observations in total (**Appendix A - E**).

I had pupils carry out a self-evaluation for talk at the beginning of my study. There were nine statements that linked to listening and dialogue and pupils evaluated themselves on a scale between 1 and 3 (**Appendix F**). There was an intention for pupils to repeat the evaluation at the end of the inquiry for comparison but this was not possible.

Following my baseline observation, I introduced talk rules by adapting a resource created by Dawes (2008) and discussing as a class. Interestingly, pupils decided that they thought 'no-one could change their mind'. I explained that anyone could change their mind and we did not all have to have the same opinion. We then agreed our Talk Rules and created a poster (**Appendix G**) so we had a visual reminder. Pupils displayed signs of pride about them and began referring to them immediately when talking to each other. I also introduced the physical listening cues poster (**Appendix H**) and timetabled in a 10- minute weekly discussion.

Prior to carrying out Observation 2, I read this quote "Listening is not easy. It requires a deep awareness and a suspension of our judgements and prejudices. It requires openness to change. It demands that we value the unknown, and overcome the feelings of emptiness and precariousness that we experience when our certainties are questioned" (Rinaldi, 2001, p3). This prompted me to share the terms agree or disagree and reminded them it was ok to change their mind.

Observation 3 developed pupils further by introducing the terminology 'tolerance' and 'opinion'. This session followed the style of the previous sessions and was a very engaging session for pupils. Observation 4 was also the same format but results from this then led me to change the style of Observation 5.

Ethical considerations and relationships with others

Since my project required me to research with others, it was essential that I proceed ethically. I needed to have a complete understanding of the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2018) so I read this and completed all the advised reading in the Ethics module in the Research Methods course. I completed the Faculty Ethical Clearance Checklist, which requested I agree to subscribe to the BERA's Code of Practice, which I did. I also obtained permission to carry out the research within my setting from the Senior Leadership Team. The checklist also ensured I understood that I would be required to obtain informed consent to carry out my inquiry. Due to the age of the participants involved in my inquiry, I needed to ensure I obtained parental consent to include their child in my inquiry. Due to COVID 19, the safest way to obtain this was via a Google Form (**Appendix I**) and in the email requesting completion of this I also included an Information sheet (**Appendix J**) explaining the timeline and purpose of the inquiry, intended impact of the inquiry and what the inquiry will involve. I also included a Privacy Notice (**Appendix K**) explaining how the data I collected

would be used, processed and stored and provided parents with information on how they could withdraw at any time by contacting the designated Gatekeeper for the inquiry. I received parental consent from every parent within my class of 30 pupils.

Due to being the class teacher, it was ethically proper to assign the inquiry a Gatekeeper separate from the classroom and so I approached the setting's Deputy Head Teacher to take on this role, they agreed. The Gatekeeper was provided with all the relevant information so they could answer any questions about the inquiry and both pupils and parents were informed of the withdrawal process. The Gatekeeper was given the option to withdraw at any time if requested.

I needed to ensure that pupils could assent to being included in the inquiry. I was careful to explain the inquiry in simple terms without bias or intended influence before I began the inquiry and I also reminded them regularly throughout the length of the inquiry that they could withdraw at any time if they so wished.

In addition to this, I chose to ensure that all information about individuals and the setting was treated on an 'in confidence' basis at all stages of my research. My place of employment is very strict about personal information in the public domain and abiding by the rules of GDPR so no staff lists are available online for myself as a researcher to be identified. However, with it being a public institution there is always a minimal possibility that the institution could be identified through local authority information. Therefore, I chose to ensure my inquiry does not mention the institute's name, specific location and that all individuals taking part in my inquiry will be anonymised. This is a reason I chose to use audio recordings and not video recordings in my inquiry, to ensure privacy and anonymity.

Finally, it was ethically important to consider how the benefits of the research outweigh the ethical implications of collecting data during COVID 19. I submitted a short narrative (**Appendix L**) to the Ethics committee explaining my reasoning for carrying out my research and why I felt it would overall benefit the pupils in my class.

My findings

The analysis of self-evaluation responses (**Appendix F**) showed 54% of pupils present (28 pupils) evaluated themselves as being 'brilliant' at 'listening carefully to my classmates' ideas' and the other 46% thought they could do better at this. This surprised me, as this was the focus of my inquiry and I was not yet seeing pupils demonstrate they were listening, thinking about what was being said and formulating a response, which built upon their peers' ideas. This may have linked to Lipari's (2010) idea of distinguishing between hearing and listening. I was also surprised to see that 46% of pupils were not happy to disagree with a classmate's idea.

Analysis of the baseline observation coding (**Appendix M**) revealed that there were 12 instances of pupils building on ideas; however, after looking at the transcript, many of these were instances of building on their own ideas rather than building on those of others. When observing the paired discussion, I noticed that pupils would contribute their idea, become distracted and not listen to their partner's ideas. Pupils did not display any physical cues of listening. The session was heavily facilitated by the teacher, much like a discussion between teacher and pupil – this is reflected in the data. There was no evidence of pupils challenging each other. I felt this observation solidified my choice of focus for my inquiry question.

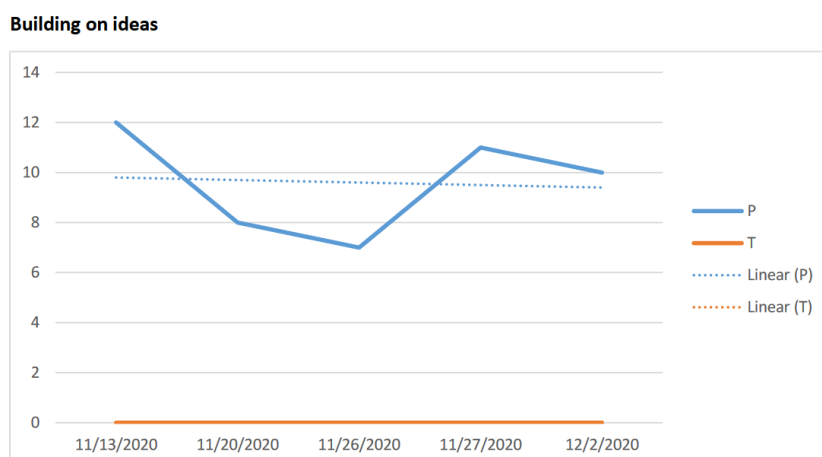
It was evident in the transcription of Observation 2 that pupils were beginning to explore the language of ‘agree’ ‘disagree’ etc. with teacher support. I was also pleased to observe pupils beginning to put the physical listening cues into practice; I believe that this supported the dialogic listening, which was starting to happen. This was similar to the baseline observation with 13 instances of teacher inviting others to build on ideas. However, I felt it did flow better and that some pupils were becoming more confident with sharing their ideas with each other. I was pleased to observe two instances of pupils challenging others. There was also one instance of a pupil inviting a classmate to build on their idea.

An excerpt from Observation 3 in **(Appendix M)** shows that pupils had begun to practise dialogic listening using our physical listening cues and talk rules, this resulted in pupils building on each other’s ideas and one pupil invited another to build upon their ideas. Child 17 clearly builds upon Child 5’s idea then Child 4 invites further building upon ideas by questioning “why?” once Child 17 responds, Child 4 then goes on to agree and build on the idea further by relating it to their own experience.

I felt the question I selected for Observation 4 was too abstract this resulted in slightly reduced participation and resulted in a lot of agreement in the class. There were more instances of building on ideas than the previous observation but again this was the pupil building on their own idea and not others. One pupil overtly changed their opinion, which was positive, and a pupil challenged the meaning of the question, which was pleasing. Reflecting on Observation 4 caused me to consider whether the dialogic listening skills that pupils had learnt would be transferable to another type of discussion. Therefore, I decided that Observation 5 would be a collaborative art activity rather than a discussion question.

My final observation was a positive one. Pupils demonstrated they were listening to each other through the physical listening cues, took it in turns, shared their ideas and were building on each other’s ideas (10 instances). There were 6 instances of pupils challenging each other. Teacher facilitation was less and pupils were having a sustained dialogue.

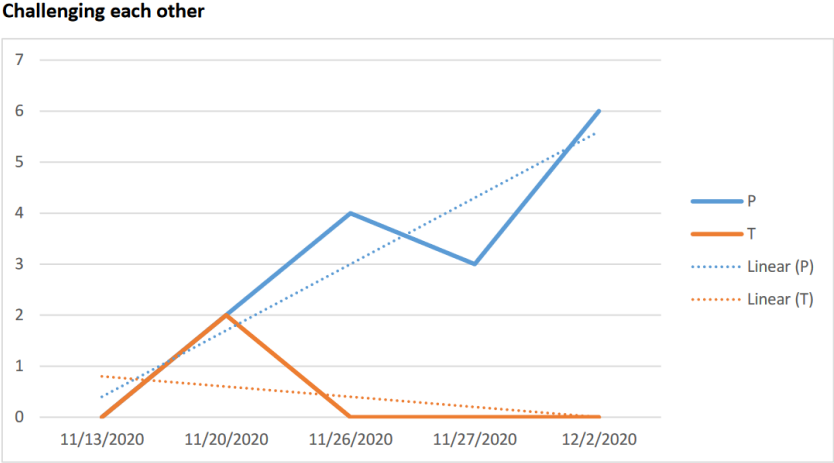
Building on ideas



The instances of pupils building on ideas follows a decreasing trend line. My earlier observations showed that pupils predominately built upon their own ideas and not those of others. In the final 2 observations, pupils built more on each other’s ideas. This suggests that the introduction of the talk

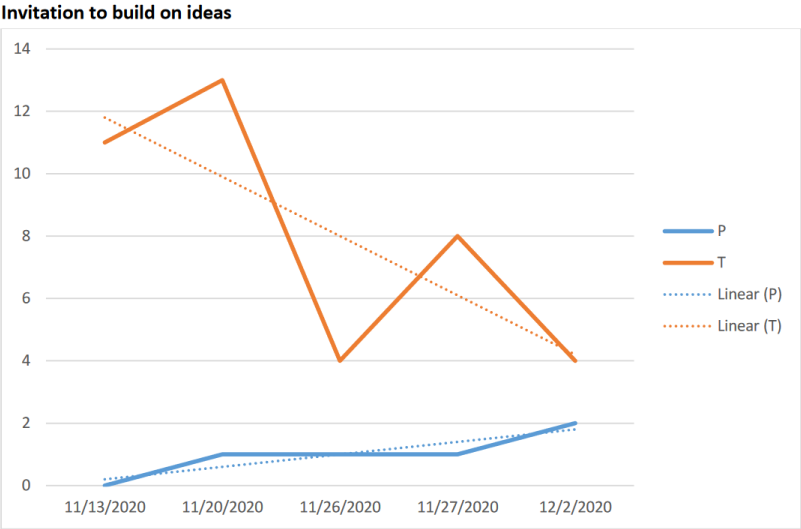
rules and the physical listening cues poster supported this development as they primarily focused on pupils listening to one another, thinking about it and then formulating a response building upon it.

Challenging each other



The graph above shows that instances of pupils challenging one another has risen. This was a pleasing result because it demonstrates that through the implementation of the talk rules, physical listening cues and teacher modelling, pupils began to understand that it was ok to disagree and challenge each other’s ideas.

Invitation to build on ideas



This was an area of dialogue which was very teacher led and initially pupils did not invite each other to build on ideas. The instances of teacher inviting pupils to build on ideas reduced but pupils’ instances slowly increased. This is evidence that as pupils listened more to one another they began to ask questions to enquire further therefore teacher facilitation was not as necessary. This was particularly evident in the collaborative art activity in Observation 5.

Overall, as a class teacher, I have seen marked improvement in the way pupils listen and speak to each other and encouraging dialogic listening within my classroom has resulted in pupils sustaining

conversations with each other. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data I do think that the implementation of the talk rules and physical listening cues poster have been the key mechanisms for change.

The resource you created

I created a child friendly poster (**Appendix H**) which is a reminder of the 4 physical listening cues that pupils can do to demonstrate they are listening to a classmate in the classroom.

Before I introduced this poster, I asked a pupil to come and tell me about what they had for breakfast. During their explanation, I looked around distracted, turned my body away from the pupil and then once they had finished speaking, I asked them to tell me what they had said again. The pupil looked irritated, as did the rest of the class. I identified this aloud and asked them why they were feeling this way, they told me “I wasn’t doing good listening” “I didn’t care about what the pupil was saying” and “That I wasn’t using my brain”. I explained that I had done these behaviours on purpose and I was copying many of the behaviours I had seen when pupils were speaking. I asked them what they thought I should be doing to show I am listening and they fed back their ideas. I explained the importance of showing the person who is talking that you are listening and how this links to our talk rule 2. I then introduced the physical listening cues poster and we modelled what these would look like in the classroom. I referred to the poster throughout all areas of my teaching practice. The physical listening cues were easy to remember and pupils were excited to show their classmates that they were listening to each other.

Changes to practice

The biggest change to my practice has been making time to consider how I can encourage pupil’s dialogic listening in all areas of the curriculum. Although, listening in the classroom has always been an important part of my practice, I focused on how I listened to pupils. This inquiry has shifted my perspective and highlighted the importance of providing pupils with opportunities to learn how to listen to each other, co-construct ideas and take an active role in dialogue.

My reflective evaluation of the process

The creation of talk rules was an aspect of my inquiry that went well. These made a positive impact on the pupils’ ability to listen and sustain dialogue with each other because they were created by the pupils who had ownership of them and found them easy to refer to. The class teachers also referred to and modelled them consistently to ensure their importance was clear.

The introduction of the physical listening cues poster had a positive impact on pupil dialogue in the classroom. It was simple, child friendly and was introduced after pupils had observed an example of poor listening. It was again, referred to consistently throughout the inquiry. This combined with the introduction of talk rules had the biggest impact on my pupils’ ability to sustain dialogue with their peers.

The introduction of timetabled discussion meant that time was made for it in the week; it highlighted the importance of developing our dialogue to the class.

I was pleased to have the support of the Senior Leadership Team in my setting, this combined with the support of my job share teacher and my pupils' parents resulted in a supportive environment to carry out my inquiry.

I was surprised at how much information you could obtain from the T-SEDA coding templates. I had not experienced transcribing and coding in this way before and I was excited about the amount of possibilities and ways in which they can be used and compared. I had to reign myself in as I would get excited when observing pupils using other dialogic strands that were not the focus of my inquiry.

I was disappointed with my choice of discussion question in observation 4, it was too abstract and although some pupils did engage with it, participation did reduce. This caused me to consider whether the dialogic skills pupils had learnt were transferable to a collaborative art activity so reflecting upon this resulted in a change of course, which did show positive results.

I was also disappointed with the external challenges I encountered. I felt the length of time it took to submit and then resubmit the ethics forms after the University changed their pro-formas did delay me from starting my inquiry. The length of my inquiry was hindered by myself contracting COVID 19 and being unable to continue my inquiry remotely.

If I were to repeat this inquiry then I would consider refining my inquiry and implementing the strategies more slowly. I was a little over zealous and tried to fit too much into one inquiry and think that it would have been better to implement one strategy in the first inquiry cycle and then the other in a second. I would have liked to have analysed the data and compared which strategy had the biggest impact on sustained dialogue in the classroom.

Finally, the audio recording worked well for this inquiry but after attending the taught session on 'Analysing classroom talk and nonverbal interaction', I considered the differences between an audio recording and a video recording and the additional data on nonverbal cues that could have been obtained. Therefore, if I continue this research in the future then I would like to include video recordings so I could look at the nonverbal cues in more detail.

Next steps

In the immediate future, I am going to look at how transferable our talk rules are to our remote learning virtual sessions. I will also consider how to adjust the physical listening cues poster to suit a virtual learning environment.

I am keen to share my initial findings with my colleagues in my setting and so I will approach my setting's Senior Leadership team to discuss the possibility of being a facilitator of some training and wider discussions on dialogue in the autumn term 2021. I am experienced in coaching Newly Qualified and experienced teachers and so in the future, I would certainly like to share this experience with others and support them in developing their dialogic practice in the classroom.

I would like to continue this initial inquiry by reflecting on my practice, trialling strategies and analysing their impact. I had intended to implement the use of QR codes which link to discussion questions for pupils to access independently during their child initiated learning time but due to COVID 19, I was unable to carry this out. So, I would like to trial this and look at how well pupils listen and sustain conversation without a teacher facilitating the discussion.

Finally, in my inquiry I did have experience of reticent pupils during the discussions so I would like to explore ideas of how I could engage them further.

References

- Alexander, R. (2020). *The dialogic teaching companion*. London: Routledge
- Bakhtin, M.M, (1986) *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (V.W, McGee, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press
- British Educational Research Association, (2018). *Ethical guidelines for educational research (Fourth edition)*, London:BERA
- Dawes, L. (2008), Ground Rules: Traffic Light Activity, retrieved from <https://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk/resources/>
- Gaunt, A & Stott, A, (2019) *Transform teaching and learning through talk: the oracy imperative*. London: Rowman & Littlefield
- Lipari, L. (2010). Listening, Thinking, Being. *Communication Theory*, 20(3), 348-362.
- Littleton, K & Mercer N. (2013) *Interthinking: putting in talk to work*. London:Routledge
- Mercer, N., Wegerif, R., & Major, L. (2020). *The Routledge international handbook of research on dialogic education*.London:Routledge
- Mercer, N, Warwick, P, & Ahmed, A. (2017). An oracy assessment toolkit: Linking research and development in the assessment of students' spoken language skills at age 11-12. *Learning and Instruction*, 48, 51-60.
- Rinaldi, C. (2001). The pedagogy of listening: The listening perspective from Reggio. *Innovations In Early Education: The International Reggio Exchange*, 8(4), 1-4

Camtree

Camtree: the Cambridge Teacher Research Exchange Camtree is a global platform for close-to-practice research in education. Based at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge, Camtree draws on high-quality research from around the world to support educators to reflect on their practice and carry out inquiries to improve learning in their own classrooms and organisations. The outcomes of these inquiries, once peer reviewed, can be published within the Camtree digital library under a Creative Commons Licence (CC-BY 4.0). You can find out more about Camtree and its digital library at www.camtree.org.

Appendices

Appendix A - T-SEDA 2a coding template and reflection – Observation 1

Appendix B - T-SEDA 2a coding template and reflection – Observation 2

Appendix C - T-SEDA 2a coding template and reflection – Observation 3

Appendix D - T-SEDA 2a coding template and reflection – Observation 4

Appendix E - T-SEDA 2a coding template and reflection – Observation 5

Appendix F – Pupil self evaluation data

Appendix G – Talk rules poster

Appendix H – Physical listening skills poster

Appendix I – Ethics – Parent consent form

Appendix J – Parent information form

Appendix K – Ethics privacy notice

Appendix L – Ethics – Short narrative relating to COVID-19

Appendix M – Observation coding analysis data set

Appendix N – Excerpt of transcript from observation 3

Appendix O – reflective cycle of inquiry