‘Talk is a distinctly human characteristic. It begins as an unfettered chattering voice: a constant stream of consciousness inside our heads which offers an ongoing commentary and critical evaluation of life around us’ (Corden, 2000).

Talk is an exciting, challenging and stimulating part of classroom life and ensuring that it becomes part of geography lessons and is encouraged by geographical resources, as suggested throughout this journal, will allow pupils to share their ‘evaluations of life’ as described by Corden.

Geography begins from the local but is informed by the global and within this range there is a huge scope of possibility for talk in which pupils can begin to make sense of this somewhat confusing and changing, diverse and complex world.

Lindfors (1999) writes about ‘the self in talk’ and this notion of personal expression is crucial in the primary classroom and gives teachers an opportunity to ‘slow down’ and reflect on what can sometimes be overlooked due to thinking about sub-levels, objectives and inspections – that of the pupil’s voice. Lindfors (1999) continues to explain three human urges:

- to connect with others
- to understand the world
- to reveal oneself within it.

These urges can all be expressed through talk and as this journal shows through creative geography lessons/experiences.

McDonagh (1999) and Grugeon et al. (2005) explain how talk helps learning develop into understanding and if pupils are to become successful, critical enquirers this transfer of knowledge to understanding is extremely important for all ages of child. As Cremin (2009) states ‘talk enables learners to think aloud, formulate their thoughts and opinions, and refine and develop ideas and understandings’. Enquiry is rooted in the skills, Cremin explains, and therefore it is hard to imagine a geography curriculum without talk. This journal aims to encourage teachers to have the confidence to allow more ‘talk-time’ as a valid part of their teaching routines and to take pupil voice seriously and where necessary compassionately. Lane (2006) echoes this: ‘pupils are not going to be able to take control for their learning unless they are given a voice’.

**Defining talk**

Talk is an umbrella term for what goes on in our classrooms but the type of talk we hear is impacted upon by situation, social groupings, gender, experience and lesson content. Alexander (2008) helpfully separates talk into a number of repertoires each with its own categories and methods of talk. *Towards Dialogic Teaching* is a compelling read and Alexander’s categorisation of talk is summarised in Figure 1. Further ideas on talk types can be found in Mercer and Littleton (2007).

**Dialogic teaching**

The table above highlights a range of talk types that naturally occur or can be encouraged in the classroom. However research into how the more challenging approaches to talk are encouraged stem from the notion of ‘dialogic teaching’.

Mercer and Littleton (2007) describe dialogic teaching as ‘that in which both teachers and pupils make substantial and significant contributions and through which children’s thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward. It is intended to highlight ways that teachers can encourage students to participate actively and so enable them to articulate, reflect upon and modify their own understanding’. Alexander (2008) explains dialogic teaching as teaching that is ‘collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful’.

The principles of dialogic teaching encourage teachers to reflect on talk not just as ‘classroom chatter’ but to consider talk as a powerful means of educational pedagogy. It gives teachers the opportunity to think about and make a case for different types of classroom talk which pupils can become a part of in considering their talk in the classroom.

**The classroom climate**

Effective talk is only possible if an appropriate classroom environment has been created in terms of ethos, pupil-teacher
Table 1: Categorisation of talk: a summary. Source: Alexander, 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talk Repertoire – talk for everyday life</th>
<th>Talk Repertoire – talk for teaching</th>
<th>Talk Repertoire – talk for learning</th>
<th>Talk Repertoire – organisational contexts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transactional talk</td>
<td>Rote (teacher-class)</td>
<td>Narrate</td>
<td>Whole-class teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expository talk</td>
<td>Recitation (teacher-class or teacher-small group)</td>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>Collective group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogatory talk</td>
<td>Instruction/Exposition</td>
<td>Instruct</td>
<td>Collaborative group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory talk</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Ask different kinds of question</td>
<td>One-to-one (pupil and teacher or pupil and pupil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive talk</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Act upon answers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative talk</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analyse and problem solve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Speculate and imagine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Explore and evaluate ideas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Argue, reason, justify</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiate</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be receptive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Think about what is heard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give others time to think</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Categorisation of talk: a summary. Source: Alexander, 2008.

appreciation, ground rules for talk (Mercer and Littleton, 2007) and meaningful stimuli/activities to promote talk. Central to creating a classroom ethos is developing active listening skills for all members of the classroom community. Smith (2010) describes listening as ‘the mirror of talk’ in that ‘for talk to be effective, there is a need for good listening’. This is something that teachers can support pupils to attain through specific experiences (see journal for ideas) whilst at the same time teachers ‘must get in the habit of listening to children’s talk’ (Kumer, 1994). Teachers need to model active listening and example various talk-types especially for pupils with EAL or for those pupils whose home background does not reflect active listening and dialogue.

Creating a classroom climate for talk can be challenging and takes perseverance on the part of teachers and pupils but as Murdoch and Wilson (2008) explain ‘taking the time and effort to build an effective learning community is not only worth it, but crucial for constructive learning. By nurturing a community of learners in our classrooms, we help position

students to collaborate, think, inquire and act more effectively’. Murdoch and Wilson (2008) introduce the idea of ‘pressing the pause button’ and giving time for pupils to reflect throughout a learning experience and not just through a plenary session.

Talk, as explored in this journal, can form the basis of a lesson and when carefully planned, has fruitful rewards for both pupil and teacher. A talk-orientated classroom displays children’s conversations, has prompts for conversation starters/middles/endings, displays agreements for talking and listening in different contexts and has a flexible seating/furniture arrangement to physically demonstrate different talk scenarios, e.g. circle time/debating/paired work.

A talk classroom has opportunities for individual, paired, small group and whole-class talk where the traditional view of the teacher at the front with pupils listening is dissolved into one where the teacher integrates into classroom conversations or observes and documents talk from the sidelines.

The teacher’s role

Myhill et al. (2006) explain ‘talking, listening and learning effectively does require a shift from what are often deeply routinized classroom practices, and which are probably part of our professional self-image as teachers’. In reading the ideas presented in this journal the shift Myhill et al. explains is paramount in order to successfully promote creative geographical experiences. However, the wealth of research into talk must mean that it has value within education and in taking a risk teachers can change/adapt elements of their current practice and reflect on the effects this has. As Bearne (1999) states: ‘although the business of teachers asking questions and children answering them is part of traditional practice in classrooms, this isn’t the only way – or by any means the best way – to use talk to help learning’.

If pupils are to value talk then teachers have to model a positive approach to developing a broad range of experiences, stemming from the principles of dialogic teaching and branching out to creative and purposeful cross-curricular experiences. Grugeon et al. (2000) explain arrangements which help pupils value talk as a
learning strategy but in order for this to be possible, the teacher must take time to try new ideas and give pupils the chance and time in the school day to become effective speakers and listeners. O’Keefe (1996) summarises this perfectly: ‘our best teachers in the business of education are our students’.

**Conclusions**

Most pupils talk continuously, they revert from playground dialects to educational discourse to school routines, such as assembly time, and the potential their talk has for academic and social development is more than can fit into this paper. As editor, I hope that you read this journal and feel empowered to develop some of the ideas in your geography lessons whilst adopting some ideas through a cross-curricular approach.

Geography is concerned with the future and the pupils/student teachers in our care are to shape this future world. The classroom therefore needs to be a space for pupil voice that challenges, respects and nurtures the enquiring mind of every member of the classroom community. It needs to be a safe space to explore, dream and voice experiences and this can be made possible through listening and responding to pupils’ talk.

Lindfors (1999) summarises talk as follows and I feel this powerful statement reflects the purpose of this journal and the work that may follow in your classrooms from reading the articles presented: ‘I know of no more important goal in education than that the child shall discover the power of his or her own mind. And I know of no more important source of that discovery for every child, than the inquiry that lives in the continuing exploratory dialogues of classroom life’.

**References**


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