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WRITING TALK

Developing metalinguistic understanding through dialogic teaching

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Introduction

This chapter, nestled in the section on dialogic language and literacy education, focuses on writing – specifically on students' thinking and linguistic decision-making in writing. It will bring together empirical and theoretical research on metalinguistic understanding and on dialogic teaching to develop an argument for the critical role of dialogic teaching in fostering the development and expansion of metalinguistic understanding about writing. In doing so, it will consider the limitations of binaries which position authoritative and dialogic talk as opposites and will offer a critical reframing of the role of teacher as expert in dialogic teaching. We will argue that dialogic teaching which effectively promotes metalinguistic understanding and the capacity to think metalinguistically requires teachers to orchestrate metalinguistic discussion in a way which draws on both teacher-as-expert and teacher-as-facilitator. In the context of metalinguistic discussion about writing, authoritative talk is not separate from dialogic talk but an integral part of cumulative episodes of the dialogic exploration of ideas.

The chapter also addresses the significant gap in research on dialogic teaching specifically related to writing. The disciplinary field of research is principally in the context of mathematics (for example, Chapin and O'Connor 2012; Bakker, Smit, & Wegerif 2015; Kazak, Wegerif, & Fujita 2015) and science (for example, Scott, Mortimer, & Aguira 2006; Mercer, Dawes, & Kleine Staarman 2009; Bianchi and Booth 2014; Adey and Shayer 2015). Even within language and literacy education, research on dialogic teaching has looked principally at interactions with texts (Maine 2015; Wilkinson, Murphy, & Binici 2015) or general oracy and dialogue within the English classroom (Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan, & Heintz 2013; Boyd and Markarian 2015). This gap is mirrored in research on metalinguistic understanding, which has tended to focus on second-language learning (e.g. Bialystok 2007; ter Kuile, Veldhuis, van Veen, & Wicherts 2011); early years language learners (Tunmer, Bowey, & Grieve 1983; Karmiloff Smith, Grant, Sims, Jones, & Cuckle 1996) and spelling (meta-phonological: Nunes, Bryant, & Bindman 2006; Bourassa, Treiman, & Kessler 2006 and meta-orthographical: Carovalas et al. 2005) and not on writing. Significantly, two recent randomised controlled trials on the impact of dialogic teaching on student attainment found, in one case, no effect on writing outcomes (Gorard, Siddiqui, & Huat See 2016) and in the other only tested for reading, not writing (Jay et al. 2017). At the same time, and of particular relevance to this chapter, Whitebread et al (2013; 2015) have drawn

together the separate fields of dialogic teaching and self-regulation research to argue for the potential of dialogic talk to foster metacognitive thinking and self-regulatory processes.

Our own research occupies a unique space in this landscape: we have undertaken a cumulative series of studies, investigating the inter-relationship of explicit teaching of grammar and its impact on writing attainment and metalinguistic understanding in writing (Myhill Jones, Lines, & Watson 2012; Myhill and Newman 2016; Myhill, Jones, & Wilson 2016; Newman 2017). It is this body of work which drives the thinking in this chapter, drawing on the empirical evidence of how teachers have managed dialogic talk about writing and some of the challenges they have faced.

Our theorisation of writing is interdisciplinary: historically, writing research has tended to be strongly located within disciplinary paradigms, particularly those of psychology, linguistics and socio-cultural theory, with relatively little theoretical or empirical integration between them. In effect, writing research is separated into what Juzwik et al. term as '*different discourses*' characterised by the '*coexistence of different epistemologies, problems, age levels, and methods*' (Juzwik et al. 2006:457) and an absence of inter-disciplinary conversations. We have sought to redress this separation by conceptualising writing, and thinking about writing, through an interdisciplinary lens with a tripartite focus on writing as an integrated process which combines the individual, the social and the textual. An attention to the *individual* takes account of cognitive models of writing (Flower and Hayes 1981; Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987; Berninger and Swanson 1994) which primarily consider the mental processes involved in creating a text and attend to the process of writing in terms of planning, generating and reviewing (Alamargot and Chanquoy 2001) and signal the importance of metacognition in writing (Hacker, Keener, & Kircher 2009). Of particular relevance to this chapter, cognitive psychology also frames writing as a problem-solving enterprise in which '*all writers must make decisions about their texts*' (Kellogg 2008:2) – where multiple choices have to be made throughout the writing process about content, organisation and structure and expression. In contrast to the tendency of cognitive psychology to focus on the individual, the lone writer, socio-cultural perspectives position the writer within a community of practice (Haas Dyson 2003) and view writing as a *social* process, where individuals have to learn about the expectations of writing within different writing communities and different disciplinary discourses. Finally, linguistic understandings of writing spotlight the *textual* and are perhaps more concerned with writing as a product, than writing as a process, and illuminate for example, syntactical development in writing (Perera 1984) and how linguistic choices construct particular meanings in particular contexts (Halliday 1975). We are interested, then, in how teachers' verbal classroom interactions with students about linguistic choices in writing (the social) support students' metalinguistic decision-making (the individual) about their own writing (the textual).

Metacognition and metalinguistic understanding of writing

Metacognition is an over-arching cognitive process which refers to the way in which we can have active control over our thinking processes, or put more simply, thinking about our thinking. Flavell described metacognition as '*one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes*' (Flavell 1976:232) and argued that metacognition was composed of both knowledge of cognition and regulatory control of cognition. So metacognition is broadly defined as '*any knowledge or cognitive activity that takes as its object, or regulates, any aspect of any cognitive enterprise*' (Flavell 1992:114). Cognitive research has repeatedly signalled the importance of metacognition in writing (Kellogg 1994; Berninger et al. 1994; Hacker et al. 2009) because the act of writing requires self-monitoring and management of the task. Writing also requires high-level metacognitive rhetorical

planning (Hayes and Flower 1980), and through metacognition, covert processes can be made visible (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1982). Indeed there is a '*close relationship between metacognition (in the form of metacognitive skills and metacognitive knowledge) and the development of compositional expertise*' (Alamargot and Fayol 2009:37). In particular, there is robust empirical evidence of the positive effect on writing outcomes of the training in self-regulation in writing (Graham and Perin 2007; Graham, Wilcox, & Early 2014). However, none of the research on metacognition and self-regulation in writing has attended to linguistic choice, and the text itself has seemed less significant than the process which generates it. Yet, as Gombert points out, writing requires '*a higher level of abstraction and elaboration … metalinguistic development thus appears to be of primary importance in the acquisition of writing*' (Gombert 1992:151–152). He argues that metalinguistic understanding is commonly seen as a subset of '*the general heading 'metacognition' concerned with language and its use*' (Gombert 1992:5) and in line with Flavell's definition of metacognition involving both cognition and regulatory control, so Gombert conceptualises metalinguistic understanding as both reflecting on language in use and the '*ability intentionally to monitor and plan their own methods of linguistic processing (in both comprehension and production)*' (Gombert 1992:13).

Gombert also draws attention to the fact that metalinguistic understanding is interpreted differently in linguistics and psychology: in linguistics, it refers to language about language, whilst in psychology it refers to cognition about language (Gombert 1992:8). Our own research has examined whether explicit pedagogical attention to the grammar of written text can improve student outcomes in writing. This research has drawn on Halliday's functional approach which positions grammar as social semiotic: it highlights the idea of grammar as '*a resource for meaning-making*', and that '*text is a process of making meaning in context*' (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014:3). Halliday describes becoming a more proficient language user as a process of learning how to mean (Halliday 1975): arguably, a process in which metalinguistic understanding needs to be activated and in which dialogic teaching can be a powerful enabler. Thus, one aspect of accomplishment as a writer lies in the meaningful selection of grammatical structures to match the author's intended communicative and rhetorical effect. In other words, writing is not a simple translation of words-in-the-head to words-on-the-page but a process of deliberate, conscious choice and control. Consider, for example, the different rhetorical effect of switching the adverbials from the front to the end of the two sentences in Table 25.1.

The point is not that one sentence is better than the other but that the writer makes a linguistic choice, dependent upon his rhetorical intention – to foreground the image of the two eggs or to foreground the position of the eggs next to each other on the sand. Such choices are part of the repertoire of the accomplished writer, but our research has shown that developing writers need direct instruction to generate metalinguistic understanding of the effect of these linguistic choices (Myhill and Newman 2016). This links with Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1986) analysis of children developing from a knowledge-teller, where the writing is an unshaped chain of ideas, to knowledge-transformer where there is '*a mental dialogue between content and rhetoric*' (Sharples 1999:22). The teaching of writing, therefore, needs to '*enable pupils to make choices from among a range of linguistic resources, and to be aware of the effects of different choices on the rhetorical power of their writing*' (Lefstein 2009:382). In other words, teaching needs to attend to students' metalinguistic under-

Table 25.1 The rhetorical effect of moving adverbials in a sentence

Sentence 1	<u>*Side by side*</u> <u>*on the sand*</u> *sat two eggs*. (opening sentence from *Croc and Bird* by Alexis Deacon)
Sentence 2	*Two eggs sat* <u>*side by side*</u> <u>*on the sand*</u>.

standing about writing, both in terms of *thinking* about writing and using *language about writing*. Such metalinguistic understanding fosters a sense of writing as design, in which writers are both creative thinkers and problem solvers (Sharples 1999:10). It is in this context that dialogic teaching offers possibilities for generating productive space for dialogic metalinguistic talk about writing and for forging a closer learning relationship between talking and writing.

Metatalk about writing

Shanahan (2006) has drawn attention to the lack of empirical studies investigating the relationship between talking and writing, other than in early language development. Yet, there has long been advocacy of the value of talk in supporting writing development, frequently drawing on Britton's assertion that '*reading and writing float on a sea of talk*' (Britton 1983:11). This has, however, tended to be more attentive to talk *for* writing, the kind of talk that helps to generate ideas for writing, rather than to talk *about* writing which develops more specific understanding of the complex ways in which writing creates meanings. Uniquely, the concept of metatalk focuses upon this talk *about* writing. The term 'metatalk' derives from second-language learning (L2), and particularly from Swain's (1995; 1998) coining of the word to describe metalinguistic reflection on language use. However, because of the nature of second-language learning, metatalk in L2 is more focused on the form of the target language and how it communicates: in other words, metatalk supports reflection on language as a system. In contrast, our appropriation of the term for first-language learners retains the idea of '*language used for cognitive purposes*' (Swain 1998:69), generating a '*deeper level of attention*' (Storch 2008:96) to the relationship between meaning, form and function, but is more concerned with understanding linguistic choices in writing as *functionally oriented* (Halliday 2004), rather than form-oriented. In other words, our interest is not in subject–verb agreement or management of tense, which are often key concerns for L2 learning; rather our interest is in supporting growing awareness of how linguistic choices subtly alter the way a text conveys its communicative message: a third person narrative, for example, establishes a different relationship with the reader than a first person narrative. Being able to recognise and discriminate between these choices is an important aspect of developing as a writer.

Metatalk, then, is a specific kind of talk about writing with a focus on language use. It encourages the articulation of thinking about linguistic choices, some of which may be internalised or subconscious decision-making, but some of which represent new ways of knowing and understanding the relationship between a writer's authorial intention, the linguistic choices which realise that intention and the intended effect on the reader. Metatalk involves both the individual's thinking about writing and the shared understandings developed within the classroom as a writing community and is distinctively concerned with talk about linguistic choice. At the same time, metatalk, through enabling and encouraging this verbalisation of choice, is a pedagogical tool which allows teachers to determine the level of thinking and understanding that students have developed.

Verbalisation of metalinguistic understanding

This verbalisation of choice is one very real benefit of metatalk: it is the means by which this metalinguistic understanding can be articulated, shared and examined. It is thus potentially a very powerful manifestation of *learning* talk. Verbalisation allows learners to make their thinking accessible for scrutiny and discussion and '*helps learners to make explicit to themselves and others what they know, understand or can do*' (Edwards and Westgate 1994:6). At the same time, verbalisation brings new thought into consciousness: '*it is through sharing and explaining our ideas that we bring*

our own thinking to conscious awareness' (Larkin 2010:114). Thus metatalk creates possibilities for simultaneously 'learning through language' and 'learning about language' (Halliday 1993:112).

However, there is conceptual disagreement in the metalinguistics field regarding verbalised metalinguistic understanding, a disagreement linked to implicit and explicit knowledge (for a fuller discussion, see Myhill and Jones 2015). On the one hand, some like Roehr (2008) argue that metalinguistic understanding is declarative and therefore must be accessible '*for verbal report*' (Roehr 2008:179). In contrast, others (e.g. Camps and Milian 1999) distinguish between verbalisable and non-verbalisable understanding, seeing the latter as active procedural knowledge which can be used in writing but which the learner cannot explain in words. Non-verbalisable metalinguistic understanding, thus defined, would be deemed epilinguistic, or implicit, by many such as Gombert (1992). Whilst this may seem a purely theoretical debate, it has relevance for this chapter and for thinking about the role of dialogic talk in supporting learning about writing. The distinction may be less to do with procedural/declarative or implicit/explicit binaries and more to do with the relationship between language and thought and how to put into words thinking which is only partially formed. In Australia, working with Australian primary children, Chen and Jones (2012) found that there were students who know, consciously, what they are doing but struggle to articulate it. Similarly, in our own research, we have regularly encountered learners who seemed to be trying to explain something but not quite finding the right words. In the example the follows, 13-year-old Lucy is talking about a peer's writing in a research interview and struggling to explain her point:

Lucy:	The second one – it's like saying what happens and then just like stops a bit and then just goes on and it's just like stoppy starty a bit.
Interviewer:	Right can you tell me what you mean? So what do you mean by, what stops and what starts?
Lucy:	Like, erm, it's saying like '*suddenly my goggles were hit with a ball of ice*' and then it likes carries on – it says '*unexpectedly my board fell away from me*'. It's just like he could have gone into detail about what happened, like did his goggles fall off or something or other, but it just starts and stops, so it does that.

Thus one important aspect of metatalk may lie in its encouragement of the verbalisation of partially grasped ideas which '*raises consciousness about patterns of language*' (Schleppegrell 2013:168). Such verbalisation may enhance students' capacity to think metalinguistically about writing and not only develop knowledge about linguistic choices, but through this, it may enable greater, more agentic control of linguistic choices and, crucially, a transfer of verbalised metalinguistic understanding into writing outcomes.

Dialogic teaching

Our concern, then, is with how metatalk about writing can support the development of metalinguistic understanding about linguistic choices in written text and through that enable greater independence and effectiveness in decision-making as a writer. In other words, we are interested not so much in the general improvement of thinking skills to enhance academic attainment but specifically in improvement of writing competence. Although dialogic talk is variously described as *exploratory* talk (Barnes 2010; Mercer 2000; Gillies 2016); *dialogic* talk (Michaels and O'Connor 2007; Alexander 2008; Wegerif 2011; Reznitskaya et al. 2009); and *accountable* talk (Resnick, Asterhan, & Clarke 2015), our precise interest is in dialogic *teaching* and how the teacher orchestrates metalinguistic discussion about writing. Central to this

general body of research on dialogic, exploratory or accountable talk is an emphasis on breaking away from teacher-dominated classroom talk, characterised by passive learning and transmission of knowledge, to more actively constructed knowledge. As Resnick et al. describe it, '*we can use the opportunity of classroom talk to teach students to think—to make knowledge*' (Resnick et al. 2015). Sociocultural studies into dialogic talk, such as those by Mercer and Littleton (2007) and Alexander (2018), emphasise not only the relationship between talking and thinking but also the skill of the teacher in managing classroom talk to enable learning to occur. As Alexander argues

> *although student talk must be our ultimate preoccupation because of its role in the shaping of thinking, learning and understanding, it is largely through the teacher's talk that the student's talk is facilitated, mediated, probed and extended – or not, as the case may be.*
>
> *(2018:3)*

One short-coming in empirical research investigating teachers' management of talk is perhaps an over-focus on the more surface features of dialogic classroom discourse, particularly on the classification of questions, on triadic discourse patterns and on length of student responses. Boyd and Markarian (2015) note that the focus on open questions, for example, can emphasise the form of the question, rather than the function, and the nature of the interaction sequence which follows. Instead, their interest is in dialogic stance and '*how patterns of talk may open up discourse space for exploration and varied opinions*' (Boyd and Markarian 2015:273). It is in this discourse space, or dialogic space (Wegerif 2013), that possibilities for nurturing metalinguistic understanding are made real. Whilst there is much value in researching and theorising the interpersonal interactions in dialogic teaching, including the nature of collaborative talk, and the ways in which peers interact and negotiate discourse roles, our own specific concern is with the cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural learning that can inhabit dialogic space. In Alexander's terms, we are fundamentally interested in *cumulative* talk, where students build on each other's contributions and create chains of coherent thinking and understanding, and *purposeful* talk, which is both open and dialogic and is structured with clear learning goals in mind (Alexander 2008). Our own research has shown that teachers are not always successful in managing this kind of talk (Myhill and Newman 2016; Myhill et al. 2016) and like Alexander (2017a:49–53), we have found that teachers are not always secure in navigating the negotiation of meaning in cumulative talk. In light of this, Boyd and Markarian's (2015:275) synthesis of research offers a helpful way to structure thinking about dialogic metalinguistic talk. They bring together the ideational, '*cognitive activity for personal understanding and building knowledge*', the epistemic, which shapes '*the speaker's own perception of the world and represents it as knowledge*', and the cumulative, where talk builds '*coherent lines of thinking and inquiry*'.

Dialogic metatalk for learning about writing

The epistemic is an important aspect in considering dialogic metatalk about writing. The act of writing is cognitively highly complex – indeed Kellogg compares it to the demands of playing chess (Kellogg 2008) – and unlike many other aspects of learning, the cognitive demands of writing do not decrease with expertise. Instead, they increase. This is in part due to the challenges of managing an increasingly sophisticated linguistic repertoire at lexical, syntactical and textual levels, and in part due to writers' socio-cultural awareness of readership, context and their own authorial intention intensifying with maturation. In other words, the more expert we become as writers, the greater our epistemic awareness of what writing can be and the greater the potential gap between our goals and the unfolding text on the page.

Not only that, but writing as a language competency is not naturally learned through social interaction in the way that talk is learned. Developing writers have to learn to discriminate between the linguistic characteristics of speech and writing, most notably the management of the sentence, which is not a linguistic unit in speech but is central to writing, and the sociocultural expectations of different kinds of writing, such as managing formality and informality in workplace writing. Halliday (1993) notes the centrality of grammatical form in shaping these distinctions and gives the example of the strong tendency in English to nominalise in writing where verbs and adjectives would be used in speech (see Table 25.2).

Halliday argues that this nominalisation, or grammatical metaphor, transforms the dynamic aspect of speech which constructs reality as process into a synoptic aspect where reality is object and where nouns are privileged over verbs and adjectives. Epistemically, this requires '*a reconstrual of experience, in which reality comes to consist of things rather than doing and happening*' (Halliday 1993:111). This is only one example amongst many of the subtleties of linguistic difference between speech and writing.

However, it is not just the differences between speech and writing which make epistemic demands. Even within the framework of the conventions of genres, there is significant scope for linguistic decision-making, and each decision differently shapes the way the text negotiates its communication with the reader and the meanings it conveys. Recipes are an example of a genre where the prototypical genre characteristics are relatively stable: such as the use of imperative verbs, the use of adjectives for specification, the strong importance of clause sequencing and chronology. Yet an examination of recipes written by Mrs Beeton, Delia Smith and Jamie Oliver reveals how linguistic choices establish very different reader relationships. Mrs Beeton, talking to married woman whose marital duty was to provide good food for the family, makes heavy use of the imperative and has a bare text with no direct acknowledgement of the reader. Delia Smith and Jamie Oliver, writing for audiences who choose to cook, make greater use of the second person pronoun 'you' to build a reader relationship rather than the imperative; they make greater use of modality (could; should; might; possibly, etc.) to give the reader choices; they use persuasive language to convince the reader of the merits of the recipe, and Jamie Oliver uses colloquial lexis (*lob*; *chuck*; *damned good*) to achieve greater informality. These subtle shifts in linguistic choices are responses to the socio-cultural contexts in which these texts are written and reflect both diachronic changes in socio-cultural expectations (over time), as is the case with Mrs Beeton, but also synchronic differences across different writing communities, as with Delia Smith and Jamie Oliver.

In the light of this, metatalk about writing generates a pedagogical means for fostering the metalinguistic understanding of these complex linguistic scenarios in written text. But it is important not to underestimate the challenge of this kind of talk, which neither deals with facts nor opinions, but with conceptual abstract ideas, for which learners have little experience to draw on. Whilst reading may act as a model for writing and for some learners develops tacit linguistic knowledge which is used in writing, it does not develop metalinguistic understand-

Table 25.2 Adapted from Halliday (1993:111)

Spoken form	Written form
whenever an engine fails	*in times of engine failure*
because they can move very fast	*rely on their great speed*
happens if people smoke more	*is caused by increased smoking*

ing which can be verbalised and explored. And many students required to write as part of the school curriculum are not keen readers and may not read the kinds of texts that might suffice as models. So metatalk needs to be '*consciousness-raising*' (Schleppegrell 2013:154). Sfard (2015) talks of 'meta-level learning', giving the example of children's learning of numbers where initially numbers are linked to their everyday experiences (2 shoes; 3 sisters; 50 pence, etc.). But when negative numbers are introduced, meta-level learning is needed as the mathematics has '*stopped being a story of an external world*' (Sfard 2015:251). The same distinction is true in learning about writing: everyday language experiences may support the communication of ideas in writing, but metalinguistic understanding is meta-level learning. Sfard argues that collaborative talk may support the former but that meta-level change needs more direct involvement of the teacher: thus, in the context of metalinguistic understanding, dialogic teaching needs to be adaptive to the need for this meta-level change.

It is here that the notion of dialogic space, '*the space of possibilities that opens up in dialogue*' (Wegerif 2013:62), has particular saliency. Wegerif maintains that pedagogically we could help-fully '*talk about "opening dialogic space", through interrupting an activity with a reflective question, for example or "widening dialogic space" through bringing in new voices or "deepening dialogic space" through reflection on assumptions*' (Wegerif 2013:32). Dialogic teaching which creates this dialogic space fosters metatalk through creating opportunities for the verbalisation, discussion and justification of linguistic choices in writing and supports meta-level change. Such teaching also integrates the dialogical problem spaces of *what* to say and *how* to say it (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987) as complementary, rather than binary spaces of learning (Myhill et al. 2016).

Teacher as expert

Thus far, we have outlined the critical role of dialogic teaching in fostering the development and expansion of metalinguistic understanding about writing and have framed this through the concept of metatalk. In this final section, our concern shifts to the role of teacher in manag-ing dialogic metatalk about the relationship between linguistic choice and rhetorical effect in writing: a situation where although there is no single right answer, neither is it a totally open discussion but one shaped by the interplay of socially determined expectations of text and the individual's authorial intention. The role of the *teacher as expert* is important in creating dialogic space for metalinguistic talk about choice within the parameters of freedom and compliance in which all writing is situated.

There has been a tendency in the research on dialogic teaching to position dialogic and monologic teaching as binaries (for example, Edwards and Westgate 1994; Skidmore 2002; Alexander 2008), where dialogic teaching is valorised as 'better' learning talk than the tightly controlled, teacher-dominated triadic discourse characteristic of monologic teaching. Arguably, what this research is highlighting is the limitation of monologic discourses which privilege the teacher's voice, which see knowledge as transmissional and which give learners little voice in the construction of knowledge. Some recent research, however, has begun to challenge the abso-luteness of this binary '*where direct instruction or unidirectional transmission of knowledge is often pitted against open-ended, student-centred inquiry*' (O'Connor and Michaels 2007:276) and to acknowl-edge the role of both the monologic and the dialogic in classroom discourse (Scott et al. 2006; Wells 2006). In particular, this recognises the place for the teacher's authoritative knowledge, not as transmission, but as a way of shaping the purposefulness of the discussion. Nonetheless, this continues to sustain a counterpointing of authoritative knowledge against open-ended exploration and does not fully engage with the place of expertise and expert knowledge *within* dialogic discourse. If, as Alexander argues, '*it is largely through the teacher's talk that the student's talk*

is facilitated, mediated, probed and extended' (2018:3), the teacher's expert knowledge is critical in effective facilitation, mediation and extension of learning. In the case of metatalk about linguistic choice in writing, our own research (Myhill, Jones, & Watson 2013) has shown that teachers' own grammatical knowledge and their capacity to notice and interpret linguistic choices in written texts is of paramount importance in enabling classroom dialogue to probe and extend students' thinking. This plays out in talk sequences in terms of teacher correction of a grammatical misunderstanding (for example, talking about a noun phrase when the example is a full sentence), but more significantly, it plays out in questions which reveal the teacher's expert knowledge and support a guided discussion. Alexander (2017) has argued that of his five principles of dialogic talk, cumulative talk is the most challenging because it '*attends to its meaning and, therefore, simultaneously tests teachers' mastery of the epistemological terrain being explored, their insight into students' understandings within that terrain, and their interactive skill in taking those understandings forward*' (Alexander 2017a:49–53). In the example that follows, the teacher's knowledge, that the position of the subject in a particular sentence is altering its emphasis, shapes the sequence. There is a right answer to her first question which is needed to create space for the second question, which is more open-ended, inviting student interpretation and explanation:

Teacher: What is the subject of the sentence?
Student: The sword
Teacher: Why do you think he's chosen to do it this way round? Why has he left the shining sword – the subject – until later in the sentence?

Similarly, in the next example, the teacher is leading a discussion with ten-year-olds about how well-chosen description reveals the character, rather than simply telling the reader about them. The children are discussing the first time we meet the character of Guinevere in Morpurgo's *Arthur, High King of Britain*. It is also the first time the character, Arthur, has seen Guinevere. The teacher asks the children what impression the description of Guinevere creates:

Student: Guinevere's pretty pretty
Teacher: What do you mean by "pretty pretty"?
Student: Because, like, where is it, they're like describing her hair saying "honey and gold, washed in milk", that sounds like she's quite pretty.
Teacher: OK, so the words that the writer is using then. What words can you pick out that suggest prettiness?
Student: 'Her hair was the colour of honey and gold washed in milk' – She would be perfect – I think that might mean kind of like love
Teacher: So you're associating words like honey and gold with niceness, positive images?
Student: She plays the harp but it's nice, she looks like she's doing it effortlessly and no-one else can do it as good and it says effortlessly.
Teacher: So what's the word there that's particularly helped you understand that person's character?
Student: 'Effortlessly'
Teacher: Good. By using that word it helps you to understand that she's very good at it.

This may not seem like a standard dialogic sequence as there are moments where the teacher has a broad right answer in mind, particularly in relation to which words do the work of creating the character impression. But there are also moments where the teacher invites more open-ended elaboration and justification and where she picks up the student's response and offers it back to

them. The teacher-as-expert here has knowledge of how the text is working and a clear learning goal for this sequence. We would argue that this is not an interplay of authoritative and dialogic teaching but rather that the teacher-as-expert contributions are an integral part of the dialogic discussion itself. Sfard (2015) argues that to generate meta-level learning '*the teacher's telling is sometimes necessary*' because meta-level learning is '*not a mere extension of the discourse but rather involves new ways of doing things with words*' (Sfard 2015:251). In the context of metalinguistic talk about writing, the role of teacher-as-expert is as critical as the role of teacher-as-facilitator.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the critical importance of dialogic teaching in opening up metalinguistic talk about linguistic choice in written text. This metalinguistic discussion is challenging as it requires the simultaneous interplay of grammatical knowledge, which is a closed knowledge set, with knowledge of how meaning is made, which is much more interpretive and open. It is a form of meta-level learning (Sfard 2015) which moves beyond everyday reading and writing experiences. Thus we propose a reframing of the role of the teacher in dialogic talk as both expert and facilitator. Like Boyd and Markarian (2015), we argue that a dialogic teacher '*listens, leads and follows, responds and directs as he or she employs a repertoire of talk patterns across varied instructional approaches*' and in doing so is managing the complex interaction of exploratory talk and textual/grammatical knowledge.

One might argue that this kind of talk is not dialogic because it is too oriented towards fixed educational outcomes: indeed, Matusov, in Matusov and Wegerif (2014) defines teaching which is leading towards some '*preset curricular endpoints*' as monologic. However, there are different ways to think about, and realise, curriculum outcomes. In the case of writing, teaching which promotes a particular form of schooled writing, heavily shaped by assessment goals, can lead to developing writers learning hollow, 'formulaic' rules about good writing (Ryan 2014) and having little agency or independence as writers. Alternatively, dialogic teaching which fosters metalinguistic thinking and decision-making about writing is potentially empowering, democratising the writing process. It is, of course, fairly easy to subscribe to dialogic principles but to enact them monologically in practice, particularly if there is too much emphasis on surface characteristics of dialogic talk (Boyd and Markarian 2015), rather than on a dialogic stance. Alexander argues that '*a dialogic pedagogy doesn't necessarily presuppose a dialogic epistemology, but a dialogic epistemology cannot realistically be fostered by other than a dialogic pedagogy*' (Alexander 2018:5). In the context of writing, metatalk is essentially epistemologically dialogic: a view of learning about writing as an induction into a fluid community of practice, rather than compliant adherence to a set of conventions, and a view of writing as more about linguistic choice than linguistic performance.

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