Chapter 10

Engaging Teachers in Dialogic Teaching as a Way to Promote Cultural Literacy Learning: A Reflection on Teacher Professional Development

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10.1 Introduction

Effective teacher professional development (PD) is an important part of successfully implementing educational innovations (Bakkenes et al. 2010). However, research has shown that not all PD is effective, largely because it has not been developed based on theoretical understandings around teacher professional learning, such as reflective practice, teacher collaboration and teacher agency and inquiry (e.g. Borko et al. 2010; Hofmann 2019; Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). This chapter concerns the PD program developed as part of the DIALLS project. The chapter places particular emphasis on the ways in which the PD program was informed by the literature on teacher professional learning and effective features of PD, as well as the literature on promoting dialogic pedagogy. The literature on PD promoting dialogic pedagogy reports varied success (Hennessy and Davies 2019). Examining how PD programs can be informed more closely by the theory on teacher professional learning can contribute to this issue.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a 15-lesson Cultural Literacy Learning Programme (CLLP) was created in order to promote the cultural literacy of students of three age groups, namely pre-primary, primary and secondary education. Each lesson introduced students to a cultural theme (e.g. tolerance, empathy, social responsibility) via a wordless text (short film or picturebook) as stimuli for dialogue and argumentation. The majority of teachers were novice to the use of wordless films or books and the

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promotion of students' dialogue and argumentation skills. To address these innovations, a DIALLS PD program was developed in each of the seven countries where the CLLP was to be implemented.

The chapter starts by reviewing theories of professional learning and effective PD programs with a view to explain how these were incorporated in our PD program. It also describes the challenges often faced in supporting teacher reflection and collaborative learning and the ways in which these were addressed in our effort. It then discusses how the PD promoted dialogic pedagogy and argumentation as means to discuss cultural texts. It presents tool-mediated practices that were introduced in order to support teachers in promoting dialogue and argumentation in their teaching. We end by presenting the results emerging from a content analysis of qualitative comments made by teachers in the UK and Cyprus, reflecting on their experience with the PD and its benefits.

10.2 Theories of Teacher Professional Learning Incorporated in the DIALLS Professional Development

The development of the DIALLS professional development (PD) program built on literature on general features of effective teacher PD, and research on professional learning and change specifically related to developing productive classroom conversations. In a recent synthesis, we reviewed research on professional learning interventions for teachers (Hofmann 2019). The findings from across these reviews, alongside further research, suggest a number of key features for professional development to support teacher learning and change in classroom practice.

Firstly, professional development should focus on learning and teaching. This involves linking broad theoretical ideas about teaching to concrete examples of classroom practice, and critically examining those in light of new theories (see also Hennessy et al. 2016; Horn and Kane 2015). Secondly, PD should integrate opportunities for teachers to learn in communities of practitioners. Research suggests that collaborative conversations with colleagues are a key site for professional learning (Evagorou and Mauriz 2017; Bannister 2015; Rainio and Hofmann 2015, 2018; Vrikki et al. 2017). Thirdly, professional learning conversations should make salient challenging discourses and allow for opportunities to discuss those (Rainio and Hofmann 2015, 2018; Hofmann 2019). Based on this research, the professional learning principles of *reflection* and *collaborative learning in communities of practice* were identified (see also Chapter 11).

However, professional learning research has also identified a number of challenges in supporting teacher reflection and collaborative learning in communities of professionals. Research shows that learning is not an automatic outcome of conversations within communities of teachers (Horn and Kane 2015; Bannister 2015; Louie 2016). Discussing and reflecting on classroom evidence does not automatically lead

to re-interpretation of practice (Rainio and Hofmann 2015, 2018; Vrikki et al. 2017). Instead, teaching and learning conversations often shy away from discussing challenges, or can be characterized by rushing into quick solutions. Research finds that this is due to unproductive discursive tools guiding professional conversations in teacher communities and professional development meetings (Vedder-Weiss et al. 2018), as well as teachers locating themselves as un-agentic vis-a-vis the desired change (Horn and Kane 2015; Rainio and Hofmann 2015, 2018). Finally, research on change towards integrating more pupils' ideas and dialogue into classroom practice shows the often under-appreciated importance of the underlying normative dimension as a hindrance to change (Hofmann and Ruthven 2018; Michaels and O'Connor 2015). Unspoken norms guide what teachers hold themselves and others accountable to in classroom practice (such as 'right answers' or 'offering immediate help'). If not explicitly addressed, the well-established classroom interaction norms can lead to dialogic interventions being implemented in a superficial way.

To support genuine professional learning and change in classroom practice, professional development therefore needs to focus on three key mechanisms of learning: the tool-mediated nature of professional change, fostering teachers' self-efficacy and understanding of their students' capabilities, and addressing the role of norms in changing sociocultural practice. We will discuss these in turn.

A sustained focus on learning and teaching in professional development conversations requires conceptual and discursive tools that enable practitioners to systematically address and re-interpret classroom practice and local challenges from the perspective of student learning (Hofmann 2016, 2019, 2020). An example of such tools was used by Dudley and Vrikki (2019) in their work with mathematics teachers who formed Lesson Study groups in order to collaboratively plan, teach and reflect on lessons. During these meetings, teachers followed a Lesson Study workbook,¹ which guided their discussions towards deeper reflection and evaluation of their teaching in relation to student learning. The tool had space for teachers to write their predictions about how specific students would respond to certain parts of the lesson and then compare those to how the students were observed responding. It also asked teachers to consider what they have discovered about how their students learn and how that would inform their future practice (Warwick et al. 2016). Another example is the 'People, Talk, Ideas' tool discussed below.

Professional learning research suggests that self-efficacy—professionals' belief in their ability to effectively handle challenges related to leadership, including self-motivational beliefs—is a key dimension in professional change (Endedijk et al. 2014), with greater self-efficacy linked to greater commitment and perseverance. We suggest that self-efficacy is central to counteract teachers' perceived lack of agency—participants' "possibility and willingness to impact (and eventually transform) the activity in the realisation of which they are engaged" (Hofmann and Rainio 2007, 309). A consistent finding from research on teaching and learning interventions in schools is that teachers often feel that dialogic and other reform interventions are going to be difficult to implement in their classrooms; an equally consistent finding

¹ Available at: <https://lessonstudy.co.uk/new-lesson-study-workbook-free-to-download/>.

is that they are commonly surprised at their students' learning and engagement once they do implement those interventions (Hofmann 2020).

Finally, our research has demonstrated the key role classroom norms play in shaping classroom practice (Hofmann and Ruthven 2018). Classroom cultures and practices are not simply attributable to individual teachers. Sociocultural norms of classroom interaction and practice affect those interactions and practice in ways that are often invisible to participants, unless broken. Unless explicitly addressed, established norms can hinder teachers' intentions to change their classroom practice. Key to developing more dialogic classroom practice is understanding the nature of the norms shaping dialogic interactions in schools. Our research has revealed the multi-dimensional nature of classroom norms which guide practice: surface level norms of classroom discussion, such as 'Respecting others' ideas', are not singular, but instead can be enunciated in terms of multiple underlying rationales which we have termed operational, interpersonal, discussional and ideational (Hofmann and Ruthven 2018). Professional development needs to make explicit the different dimensions in which rules for talk can be enacted in classrooms to avoid superficial adoption of new discursive practices. A tool developed based on this work, the People, Talk, Ideas tool (Hofmann and Ilie 2019), was employed in this project to support teachers in deepening their classroom dialogues. This tool makes salient the challenge that while many classroom discussions attend to the 'People' and the 'Talk' dimensions, they do not always attend equally to the important dimension of 'Ideas' (see Fig. 10.1). In making these dimensions of classroom dialogue visible to teachers and students

Fig. 10.1 People, Talk, Ideas tool (Hofmann and Ruthven 2018) (Source Hofmann and Ilie 2019; edtoolkit.educ.cam.ac.uk/toolkit/step2/)

alike, the tool helps them develop new forms of accountability to all of these three dimensions in classroom discussions.

10.3 Development and Implementation of the DIALLS Professional Development Programs

The described theoretical principles constituted the basis for the DIALLS professional development (PD) program. Specifically, we aimed to develop a PD that would enable reflective practices both on the part of the teacher participants and us as researchers, enhance teachers' sense of a community, and promote teachers' agency and inquiry. Teachers in the same school level (early years/primary/secondary) were involved in small-group and whole cohort discussions concerning key issues around dialogic teaching and learning, cultural literacy and using wordless texts. They were supported by a range of thinking and planning tools, and members of the DIALLS teams with significant expertise on facilitating teachers' professional learning.

Although each country locally adapted their own PD, the foundations were common. This section delves into PD development in two contexts, namely Cyprus and the UK, and the ways teachers were supported in their effort to implement the program in their practice. The researchers in both countries have a special interest in dialogue, argumentation and professional learning. In Cyprus, the PD was offered by the research team as a course of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, which is part of the Ministry of Education and Culture and it is the official body offering in-service training for teachers. The PD consisted of five two-hour sessions offered within a four-month period and it took place in three different cities covering the south and east part of Cyprus. In the UK, the PD was offered by the research team as three full days spread from October to June; the final one had to be offered as a part-day online due to COVID-19 lockdown.

A primary focus of the PDs was the promotion of dialogic pedagogy and argumentation as means to discuss the cultural texts and, thus, enhance students' cultural literacy over time. Literature has shown that transforming classroom practices to integrate dialogue and argumentation is challenging (Evagorou and Dillon 2011; Ruthven et al. 2017; Hofmann and Ruthven 2018; Maine and Hofmann 2016). Our PDs promoted dialogic pedagogy by incorporating the following four features:

- development of Ground Rules for Talk
- increasing teachers' awareness of different strategies supporting productive talk,
- highlighting features of productive student-student talk during collaborative group work
- introducing dialogue and argumentation within the context of cultural literacy learning, using wordless texts

These will be reviewed in turn.

10.3.1 *Ground Rules for Talk*

It was important to help teachers understand that a dialogic classroom ethos was crucial. During the implementation of the DIALLS lessons, students were expected to have opportunities to express their opinions freely in a safe place, without concerns of being judged or criticized. Similarly, they were expected to listen to others' views, consider them as alternatives to their own views and understand why they support one idea and not another. To this end, the PD introduced to the teachers a distinction between a dialogic classroom *ethos* (cf. Alexander 2008) and features of dialogic classroom *talk*. For the latter, 'ground rules for talk' were introduced as a strategy to the teachers to set social norms for talk both for teacher-student and student-student settings (Mercer et al. 2009; Littleton and Mercer 2013). According to Wegerif (2020), teaching ground rules 'is a form of culture change [because] any culture has implicit assumptions or expectations that shape explicit behaviour. These assumptions tend to be unconscious because you only become aware of them when they are challenged' (37).

Teachers were encouraged to negotiate such rules with their students at the beginning of the program and keep reminding them of the rules when necessary during the DIALLS lessons. Ground rules could vary from actions that create a collaborative and friendly environment to actions that encourage the critical evaluation of ideas. Decisions on which ground rules to agree on depends on the level of dialogicality a classroom already maintains and the maturity of the students. The teachers were encouraged to begin with ground rules that create a supportive environment for talk, such as "Everyone should contribute to the conversation", "Everyone listens to all ideas". Once embedded, teachers should revise the rules with their students in order to increase the level of dialogicality, supported by the People-Talk-Ideas tool described in Sect. 10.2. Examples of this could be "We build on each others' ideas", "We identify links between ideas".

10.3.2 *Strategies Supporting Productive Talk*

The PD concerned teacher strategies for supporting productive classroom discussions, such as questioning techniques and ways of responding to students' ideas during whole-class and small-group discussions. Literature has shown that classroom interactions typically follow the so-called Initiation-Response-Feedback/Evaluation pattern (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; Howe et al. 2019). This consists of the following three parts: the teacher initiating an interaction with a closed question of low cognitive demand (Sedova et al. 2016); students responding with a short answer; and the teacher evaluating the answer based on correctness. As this interactional pattern does not allow for students to express 'half-baked' thinking which can be refined based on others' ideas and critical evaluations, PD on dialogic teaching has often focused on promoting teachers' use of open questions (e.g. Sedova et al. 2016;

Table 10.1 Examples of prompt questions to scaffold productive classroom discussions

	How to ask	How to respond
Exchanging ideas	What do you think?	I think that
Building on each other's ideas	What do you think about the idea proposed by X? Can someone continue on the idea proposed by X?	I agree with the idea proposed by X and I want to add that ... I agree and also
Justifying argument	Why do you think that? What is your evidence?	I think that Because ... If, then.....
Discussing alternatives	What else could this mean? How did this make you feel?	I felt I was confused by I am not sure why..... This probably means.....
Challenging ideas	Can someone challenge this idea?	Are you sure about this? I disagree with you because..... I do not agree with your idea because ...

Wells and Arauz 2006; Lefstein and Snell 2014; Pehmer et al. 2015; Evagorou and Dillon 2020). These included authentic questions of high cognitive demand and with many possible answers. Examples are probe questions, such as asking a student for further explanation, clarification or reasoning. Similarly, uptake questions are follow up questions which incorporate a students' answer into a subsequent question. Particular attention was given to fostering *contingent* teacher responses to support students' group discussions (Hofmann and Mercer 2016). These are responses that link with students' current discussion without closing down student thinking or discussion. Examples of probe questions that were shared with the teachers during the PD, with prompts that can be used by the students to support productive talk are shown in Table 10.1.

10.3.3 Student-Student Talk

Collaborative learning is an important element of dialogic and argumentative teaching because it allows more students to express and discuss their views in the safe environment of their peers (Howe and Abedin 2013; Maine et al. 2020). Collaborative talk and argumentation, when appropriately scaffolded, lead to better learning outcomes (i.e. Evagorou and Osborne 2013) and the more the peers talk in the groups about conceptual issues, the higher the reasoning levels they achieve. This suggests that the ability to elaborate each other's ideas is associated with more sophisticated reasoning (Chin and Osborne 2010; Evagorou and Osborne 2013; Resnick et al. 2010).

Literature has shown that student-student interactions can vary in quality (Maine et al. 2020). Mercer and colleagues (e.g. Littleton and Mercer 2013) have identified three types of student-student talk: disputational, cumulative and exploratory. Disputational talk is characterized by disagreements and individual decisions; cumulative talk is characterized by general acceptance of all ideas and lack of critical evaluation; while exploratory talk is characterized by critical engagement with ideas, exploration of alternatives and attempts to reach consensus. Studies of students working collaboratively have identified that when students engage in exploratory talk, explicitly discussing each others' ideas, negotiating a shared understanding of what they are discussing and asking each other clarifying questions, this leads to better learning (i.e. Evagorou and Osborne 2013).

As group activities were central to our lessons, teachers were made aware of these three types of student talk with the help of two made-up examples of student-student talk around a text from the CLLP; one was characterized mostly by cumulative and disputational talk, while the other was characterized mostly by cumulative and exploratory talk. Teachers were asked to identify the one with more productive talk and explain why they chose it. Subsequently, teachers were asked to identify key words and phrases from their chosen example that supported their decision. We also discussed with them contingent but non-evaluative ways of supporting student discussions during group work (Hofmann and Mercer 2016; for practical examples see Hofmann and Ilie 2019, the ED:TALK Toolkit <http://edtoolkit.educ.cam.ac.uk/>).

10.3.4 The Context of Cultural Literacy Learning

Fourth, it was important to highlight how to facilitate dialogue and argumentation as a tool to develop cultural literacy using wordless texts. In order to discuss the themes that are included in the DIALLS Cultural Literacy Analysis Framework (DIALLS 2019), and therefore develop their cultural literacy skills, students should be able to participate in discussions that trigger the emergence of different, multiple perspectives (Rapanta et al. 2020). Dealing with multiple perspectives involves the ability to reflect on them, evaluate them and challenge them (Barrue and Albe 2013). Teachers can either approach cultural literacy through direct approaches—which aim to transmit and encourage the application of values defined by the teacher, or indirect approaches—also known as immersion approaches (Cavagnetto 2010)—which involve the implementation of dialogue. In DIALLS we applied the immersion approach and teachers were made aware during the PD that when engaging in the discussion of issues with multiple perspectives, their role is key, demanding and complex (Evagorou and Dillon 2011) and they should be prepared to allow different viewpoints, moral and ethical aspects to be discussed (Evagorou et al. 2014). During the PD in Cyprus, teachers reflected on their reluctance to discuss sensitive issues such as being different, or the issue of belonging, especially in classes with migrant students. Reflecting on teachers' needs, an external collaborator specializing on the discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. migration) in classes with young students was

invited in order to help teachers introduce these topics, while maintaining a safe environment for everyone.

10.4 Teachers' Views of the PD

The professional development sessions in the UK and Cyprus were offered for pre-primary, primary and secondary school teachers. Throughout the PD the teachers were asked to reflect on the different aspects of the training and their experience from the implementation of the DIALLS lessons with their classes. Furthermore, at the end of the PD the teachers were asked to complete a reflection questionnaire, which contained questions about: (a) their experience with the PD, (b) their experience with the implementation of the program and (c) the impact of the program on their students. The questionnaire contained both closed and open-ended questions on these three topics.

This chapter focuses on the open-ended responses of 29 pre-primary ($n = 19$) and primary ($n = 10$) school teachers from Cyprus, and 6 secondary school teachers from the UK on their experience with the PD. A content analysis revealed themes that emerged from this data. This section is organised around these themes, citing some representative quotes.

10.4.1 *Reflection About Teaching and Learning*

The teachers reported that they really benefited from the opportunity “to reflect and react to the material we were going to teach” [UK_secondary] and to share “experiences teaching children the same types of lessons” [UK_secondary]. Teachers’ enjoyed the focus of the professional development on “Strategies on how to deliver the lessons” and “Exploring new texts, and how these could be used analytically” which “added depth to analysis” [UK_secondary]. The use of wordless texts and videos (see Chapter 6 for more information) was also emphasized by pre-primary teachers in Cyprus “as they are important especially in supporting dialogue and argumentation skills for younger students”. Teachers reported that they “enjoyed chatting and listening to other teachers’ strategies and struggles when implementing the program in their classes” [UK_secondary] and would even “discuss the lessons both before and after the implementation with colleagues over the phone” [Cyprus_primary].

Teachers in Cyprus referred extensively to the fact that dialogue and argumentation were not part of their teaching practices, and initially they could not understand how to implement dialogue with younger students: “I did not know that it was possible to use dialogue and argumentation with younger students and during the PD I had the opportunity to acquire the skills of facilitating dialogue in a way that was easy, and provoked interest for my 5-year-old students” [Cyprus_pre-primary]. During the implementation of the DIALLS lessons the teachers reported a change in their

practices, especially in relation to dialogue and argumentation: “I provide more time to listen to students’ voices and now I invite my students to listen to each others’ ideas and build on them when possible” [Cyprus_primary]. Teachers also reported on challenges that were related to the multiple perspectives of the issues that were discussed, and their difficulty facilitating a discussion “when I did not know what the correct response is” [Cyprus_primary]. These challenges were explicitly discussed during the PD sessions in Cyprus, and teachers engaged in exchange of practices and ideas as a way to support each other.

Teachers in both countries suggest that there was a change in their students as well, especially in terms of their dialogue and argumentation skills: “After the implementation of the DIALLS lessons the students in my class learned how to take turns during a discussion and offer their points of view. I am simply standing at the side of the class now watching students that would never offer their ideas before, turn into great speakers” [Cyprus_primary].

10.4.2 Collaborative Learning in Communities of Practice

The opportunity to discuss teaching and learning within the project together with other teachers, all implementing the same project, was repeatedly described by the teachers as one of the highlights of the professional development and teacher learning opportunities, and is also discussed in Chapter 11. Teachers in the UK reported that they benefited from “[b]eing able to work with others and meet teachers from different schools. Having the opportunity to reflect with other teachers and compare experiences” [UK_secondary]. Teachers in Cyprus said that “one of the most important aspects of the sessions was that we were able to share experiences, adaptations of the lessons and difficulties that we faced with colleagues from other schools” [Cyprus_pre-primary] but also with colleagues from other parts of Cyprus that were participating in PD sessions in other cities and they had never met in person. Furthermore, teachers highlighted the need for more PD sessions spread throughout the year as a way to “reflect on each of the lessons collaboratively before implementing another one” [Cyprus_pre-primary].

10.4.3 Indicators of Change in Self-Efficacy

We discussed above how teachers often experience themselves as un-agentic vis-à-vis school and student-related challenges, when asked to implement significant new teaching or curricular approaches in classrooms. Being able to see change in their students is a significant factor related to teachers’ self-efficacy. Our teachers were initially sceptical about introducing dialogue and argumentation in their classes, mainly because they believed that their students lacked the ability to engage in dialogues. After participating in the PD and implementing the DIALLS lessons

teachers report that “Implementing the lessons helped me and my students evolve. I can identify changes in my teaching, but also in my students’ talk that can be attributed to DIALLS” [Cyprus_pre-primary]. Furthermore, teachers talked about how the changes in their classes further supported their own development: “Initially the PD helped me to change how I see my class as a whole. Now I focus on listening to everyone, I build on my students’ ideas. My persistence in listening to each other also helped me with discipline issues that I had before the PD. I think it had to do with my students accepting everyone, a part of the cultural literacy theme of the PD” [Cyprus_pre-primary].

We also discussed theoretically how providing teachers with the tools to examine classroom norms and work together with students to change those to become more dialogic is central to professional change. An example of a key tool, the People, Talk, Ideas tool is illustrated above. The teachers responded very positively to this tool: they identified how hearing the ideas “on the rules of behaviour of group work and how this is different to the rules of dialogue” [UK_secondary] offered real new insights into developing classroom dialogic practice.

10.5 Conclusion

Effective professional development, according to Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2017), not only results in changes in teaching and teaching practices, but also in considerable changes in student learning. Teachers’ views of the PD and the implementation of the DIALLS materials provide evidence of change in both directions, namely teaching practice and student learning. Teachers highlighted a change in their practices linked to introducing and facilitating dialogue and argumentation in their classes, but also reported improvements of the dialogic and argumentative ethos of their classrooms. Implementing innovations in education is never without challenges, and during the PD in the UK and Cyprus the researchers often reflected on the process and adapted their materials to support the needs of the teachers. The teachers’ responses to the PD illustrate the benefits of the theoretical principles behind the PD design: reflection on learning and collaboration in communities of practitioners and supporting teachers’ agency. In-depth reflection and productive collaborative dialogues among the teachers were made possible through the use of research-based tools supporting the teachers in re-thinking their practice and classroom dialogues. Beyond DIALLS, our case highlights the importance of building professional development interventions of solid theory of teacher learning and change.

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