Dialogic and Dialectic Feedback

Collaborative dialogue for learning: What is the impact?

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Introduction.

The New Zealand University of Waikato Assess to Learn team has been involved in providing ‘assessment for learning’ teacher professional development over the last nine years. As part of this New Zealand Ministry of Education funded ‘Assess to Learn’ (AToL) project teachers have, with the support of an assessment adviser, individually reflected on data collected from their respective classrooms. This use of a dialogical process to interpret and make sense of student voice data has proven to have significant potential to enhance teacher engagement, stimulate a careful and thorough analysis of the data and support practitioners to identify next steps in their professional learning. This research is located within the educational settings in which we currently work as advisers, facilitating professional learning. In our role we assist teachers and school leaders to develop cohesion in school-wide assessment practices and processes, to give effect to the New Zealand Curriculum, developing their expertise with ‘Teaching as Inquiry’ (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.35).

This process of critical reflection supports teachers and school leaders to build assessment capability, a necessity if they are to embed the New Zealand Curriculum in a robust way that supports students as learners. The reflective dialogue sessions have historically occurred with each teacher meeting separately with the advisor. Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks (2000) define collaborative inquiry as a process consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance to them. This case study research focuses on and explores what happens when teachers collaboratively mine and interpret their AToL classroom observation data. The adviser researchers invited two or three teachers, a purposive sample, from schools in which they were working to participate in this research on collaborative inquiry.

Although the study is set in an Assessment context we would argue that the processes are readily transferable to other contexts. The study explores two main questions:

What happens when teachers focus on and interpret their assessment classroom observation data collaboratively?

How can teachers reflect on their part in this process in order to identify the factors that contribute to clarity for their next learning steps?
Collaborative Critical Reflection
It is widely acknowledged that critical reflection about professional practice will promote the desired deep learning and sustained shifts for leaders and teachers when it takes place within communities of practice. According to Wiliam (2008) teacher learning communities appear to be the most effective, practical method of changing day to day classroom practices as they have the potential to provide support while putting teachers in the driver’s seat in charge of their own professional development. Leaders and teachers can enhance their professionalism through this problematising of practice. This process of collaborative inquiry can enable practitioners to critically reflect on any evidence they gather, enhancing their own and their students’ learning. This process is embedded in the sociocultural environments of classrooms, schools and communities.

The critical aspect of reflection is integral to both school leader and teachers’ learning. We draw from the work of Brookfield (1995) who suggests that in order to critique our assumptions we can utilise different lenses on our thinking. Collaborative critical reflection enables a dialogic community of peers who share a commitment to explore their assumptions. This process is context dependent and based on personal experiences. It involves imagining and exploring alternatives to current assumptions. Those who reflect critically are self-aware and often become more skeptical of the world around them (Franz, 2007).

Reflective Dialogue
Reflective dialogic is a process of making time and space to engage with the ideas of others. Isaacs (1999) uses the term reflective dialogue to refer to a process ‘where you become willing to think about the rules underlying what you do – the reasons for your thoughts and actions. You see more clearly what you have taken for granted.’ (p. 38) Freed (2003) considers that reflective dialogue does not occur often and that in order for it to take place we need to develop and nurture the capacity for four behaviours: suspending judgment, voicing issues, listening actively and respecting others. The adviser role in this research is to support school leaders and teachers to be discerning learners, who reflect collaboratively and critically.

Central to this reflective dialogue is to engage in active listening. Deakin Crick & Joldersma, (2007) describe an active listening process whereby participants risk take in disclosing their own views.

    Listening means allowing what the other says to break through one’s own preconceptions and prejudices. And speaking involves risking one’s own ideas by offering them to the group as a potential way to interpret truth or right action. Quality conversation is a dialogue in which each participant risks changing one’s mind or attitudes in the process of working towards mutual understanding. (Deakin Crick & Joldersma, 2007, p.92)

Advisor Role
As advisors our role is multifaceted. We work alongside school leaders and in classrooms to support teachers; gathering data for analysis and reflection, sourcing support material to link with the teachers’ inquiries and following up with additional visits. It is our role to know when to pose questions that may assist reflection. This is a form of dialogic feedback anchored in a co-constructivist paradigm. This approach contrasts with the advisor role of ‘advice dispenser’ and ‘solution provider’. Feedback in this latter model can be described as a ‘gift’ that may or may
not be wanted and acted upon. This form of feedback is commonly understood as an external evaluation. However, we view every response and every recognition in a dialogue as feedback. The dialogue is meaningful because it is a simultaneously process where people are learning and teaching with each other (Game & Metcalfe, 2009).

Askew and Lodge (2000) describe feedback in the co-constructivist model as constructed through loops of dialogue and information exchanged between participants.

"Feedback or dialogue in this approach is much less concerned with judgments…The relationship is no longer one where the expert informs the neophyte of their judgment, but one where the roles of learner and teacher are shared and the expertise and experience of all participants are respected." (p.13)

Nevertheless, as advisors we also need to recognise leaders’ and teachers’ fragility, as the risk taking in their learning may take them to the edge of their competence. Vygotsky (1978) would call this the zone of proximal development. The practitioners in the study described boundary experiences which in many cases were emotionally charged. Geijsel & Meijers (2005) consider that the main reason for this is that identity learning starts with a boundary experience, an experience in which the individual experiences the boundary of the existing self-concept.

This may provide an opportunity for learning and growth coupled with positive emotions. However, more often, it is an experience of conflict, shortcomings or inability, and of uncertainty, which is coupled with negative emotions. Boundary experiences happen when a person, trying to participate more fully (centrally) in a social practice, encounters a situation in which one is unable to function adequately because one cannot fully identify with the new situation and its exigencies. (p. 424, emphasis in the original)

Our process is to promote coaching practices with leaders and teachers, to examine evidence in order to explore taken for granted practices. Our advisor role is not to approve or evaluate. We support teachers and leaders to think critically about what they do, why they do it and how. The goal is to raise the reflective consciousness of leaders as they lead and teach during the act of teaching. Though the reflective dialogue process teachers become coaches for each other. In order for this to occur we model active listening in our work and ask leaders and teachers what we hope are critically reflective questions. There is a complexity in identifying and recognising what is on top and of importance to these practitioners.

**Research methods**
The focus of our research was on the impact of teachers collaboratively mining and interpreting their classroom observation data. We invited two or three teachers, a purposive sample, from schools in which we are working to participate in this research. Some teachers were also school leaders. There were thirteen teachers in all. The participants were positioned as the ‘knowers’ through the process of dialogical feedback. This challenges the traditional view of the “adviser expert” imparting knowledge.

Each of the groups of teachers engaged in collaborative dialogue twice throughout both 2009 and 2010. These teachers developed questions directly from classroom issues and successes, taking an appreciative inquiry approach in order to enhance student learning. They analysed and
critically explored their student and teacher voice data through collaborative dialogue. In establishing dialogue protocols with the teacher participants at the outset of this research project, the team acknowledged a view of dialogue as a key to enhancing learning in communities of practice. For the purpose of this paper, the writers have adopted the following characteristics to define dialogue:

- suspension of judgment;
- release of our need for a specific outcome;
- an inquiry into and examination of underlying assumptions;
- authenticity;
- a slower pace of interaction with silence between speakers;
- listening deeply to self and others for collective meaning.

(Ellinor & Gerard 1998, cited in Sparks, 2005 p. 2)

The teacher groups met together after the in-class data collection. In some cases the adviser had completed the observations. In others, the teachers had observed each other. Prior to the reflective dialogue sessions teachers independently analysed their student and teacher voice data. The subsequent conversations the teachers engaged in collaboratively were informed by this classroom data and analysis. The reflective dialogue meetings were videoed and teachers were provided with a DVD to view before they were separately interviewed by the adviser researchers. The intention of the interviews was to learn more about the teachers’ perspectives on the process of dialogic feedback. The following three questions which had been given to the teachers with the DVD were used to guide these conversations:

1. Identify the point at which you determined your next step action in the DVD?

2. What do you think led you to make your decision at this point?

3. How did reflecting with others influence your thinking and decision making?

During the individual interviews the teachers were videoed again and where possible, a voice recorder was used. Some teachers were provided with transcripts of their initial collaborative dialogue for reference purposes. In order to analyse the data, we used a constant comparison method. The researchers reviewed the teacher transcripts separately and then collaboratively noted categories; clarifying, rationalising and fine-tuning them through our dialogue. Through this process of inductive analysis, patterns, themes and categories emerged from the data rather than being determined prior to our data collection and analysis (Patton, 1990).

We co-constructed an overview from the data of the thirteen teachers which comprised twenty-two interviews in all. Different stories emerged from the themes we generated from the data. For the purpose of this paper we chose to illustrate the following: dialogic learning, teacher learning and identity, and using video as a second look to make the subject object.

**Dialogic Learning**

Through dialogue teachers reflect on their own experiences through the lens of another. Ravenscroft, Wegerif and Hartley, 2007 suggest that as dialogue has such an impact on thinking
and creativity, as an end to be valued in itself, it is perhaps the most important goal of education. Through dialogue teachers can be open to new ideas, ways of thinking and new ways of being. They listen, are tolerant and make new connections. Participants take time to explore, to push ideas, and use the group as a resource (Carnell & Lodge, 2002).

People in dialogue, are able to hear the differences offered by others, because they are not personally affronted. They can imagine the experience of others and therefore understand how different perspectives can co-exist. Same and different are no longer qualities attributed to discrete individuals: each participant makes a unique contribution but no one can say who contributes what. (Game & Metcalfe, 2009, p.45)

Talking with another person clarifies thinking. When listening to the stories of others, teachers relate them to their own lives. In turn when teachers tell their own story they are thinking of how their colleagues see and make meaning of their story. The presence of another person can surface ideas as the speaker considers the perspectives of their audience. Orland-Barak (2006) highlights that any one utterance may encompass not only the ‘voice’ of the person talking, but also the voice of the person the utterance is directed to, the voice of the addressee, as well as other voices gained from previous life experiences, from our history and our culture.

Belinda spoke of the need to clarify her ideas if the other person is to build their understanding. As she spoke of she was aware of her colleague’s perspective:

*That was thinking that actually then, sitting down and talking to somebody else, you really have to clarify your thinking so while the evidence was sitting in the back of my head I wasn’t really clear.* Belinda 1

*Clarifying because you had to be clear what you’re saying otherwise the person wouldn’t understand. You have really put together-the fact that you were talking brought together all bits that are in there. All the thoughts have to be clarified and internalized to a point where you are then able to say, well this is it.* Belinda 1

During Belinda’s second interview she acknowledges how the presence of another enabled her to go deeper in her thinking, more so than had she been reflecting alone:

*To do it by yourself -you don’t really; you’re so narrow-minded in your thinking. Because the whole thing is happening with just yourself and you are comparing and thinking about things which are happening in your own practice. You don’t often tend to ever go outside that. The minute that somebody else is in the conversation you are having to clarify things in more detail. You are bouncing off some idea that they may have and definitely that whole, it doesn’t even matter if the people know your students or not because then you go into even deeper levels.* Belinda 2

*...then you really go into that deeper level of, OK so this is the picture and again that evidence comes back in. Why are we getting this picture? The thinking that because you are having to explain it to somebody else, it’s much deeper. With yourself it’s very surface.* Belinda 2

Lisette also noted that through dialogue an issue was surfaced that she otherwise would not have been as cognisant of:
If it hadn’t have been brought up in the conversation I probably wouldn’t have thought of it as much as I should have otherwise. Now that I am very conscious of it, it is very important to me. Lisette

Louisa was conscious of her audience and recognised that her moments of realisation happened through the dialogic process.
Through talking with others I might have a couple of “hows” going on in my brain or sometimes I might even go “how can I fix that” and not actually have an idea. But it’s the talking with others that I go - that the light bulb (goes on). Louisa 1

Louisa recognised that the dialogic process scaffolded her thinking more than reflecting alone.
Whereas I might be sitting looking at my own stuff I come to a point I’d think oh I might try this but sometimes just that sharing of someone else’s experience helps you go ‘oh yeah’ or it might be building on something you might have thought or you might be thinking about but it just helps you scaffold that. Louisa 1

During her second interview Louisa again referred to the difference between thinking alone and thinking with others. She noted that the experiences and reflections of the other gave her ideas.
If you’re just thinking by yourself I don’t think I would have got this far because it’s the ideas and the reflections and experiences of other people that give you ideas. It’s not because you think I have to do it the way they’re doing it. It’s that building of ideas and the sharing and talking about it helps you reflect further. Louisa 2

Trudy was motivated through engaging in the professional dialogue. She noted that their talk was cumulative as it built back and forth.
What I get so much out of it is the motivation and the inspiration from my colleagues. You know, it’s ACTION. What I love most about it is that it’s really thoughtful, focused conversation about something specific. And there’s her ideas and then mine and back and forth and I do find it really motivating and inspiring and I think that’s the biggest thing for me. Trudy 1

Jane is connecting with her colleagues’ stories. She acknowledges that their ideas are helpful as they talk through the innovations that they are trialing in their practice.
Not so much what they would do if they were in my shoes. With them talking about what they might be doing with their children .... And I might think- that might work for me. Jane

Louisa is making comparisons and noticing similarities to her colleague’s practice. She found the paraphrasing and clarifying helpful for her thinking:
...so there was, we were both making comparisons, reflecting on it and then, but also there was a lot of clarifying so I noticed Trudy did a bit of paraphrasing so I would say something and she would clarify that through paraphrasing and I thought that was really quite effective. Louisa 2

Terese recognised that, through dialogue, the contributions of others can impact on her classroom practice. Her reflection on Kevin’s experience assisted her to reflect on her own:
When Kevin talks I sort of think – how can that fit in...So I had to try to process things
that would work for me - of how I was thinking. But listening sort of gave me an idea of what I could do in my classroom, what are the different sort of things I could try in my classroom that would work for me and my babies. Terese 1

Teacher Learning and Identity
The processes of thinking, acting, and learning at work are one and the same and include the formation of working and learning identities or subjectivities. The conscious process is both shaped by, and in turn shapes, individual identities which mediates how individuals engage with others (Billett & Somerville, 2004).

A close yet reciprocal interdependent relationship exists between individuals' sense of self and identity and their learning. Given that individuals play an active role in constructing meaning from what they encounter, this suggests that a focus on learning for change, working life and participation in the workplace needs to account for individuals' sense of self and identity, which are both shaped by and shape their agency and intentionality. (Billett & Somerville 2004, p.7)

The teachers’ reflections suggest that their experiences of professional learning was closely linked to their identities, who they are as people. Louisa sees that life is a process of change. In talking about “finding yourself as a teacher” she highlights how as a person and a teacher she is changing all the time. Her personal and teacher identities are interwoven.

So it’s through trying all those different ideas from shared experiences that you actually do find yourself as a teacher and of course you are going keep doing that right the way through- to find all these things all the way through cause it’s constantly changing as we do as people. Louisa 1

Andy is questioning his personal beliefs. He, like Lisette, intertwined who he is in his personal life with his professional identity as a teacher.

I’ve been doing lots of thinking pretty much since I started here I suppose –I’ve been thinking quite a lot about what’s important. A lot of it is to do with what I think is important in my life – it’s a personal thing what I’m discovering as a person and I’m trying to bring that into the class. Andy 1

Through taking ownership, initiating and innovating, Kevin came into his own sense of identity.

I am enjoying this– I’ve learnt – even in the two sessions I have had with you thus far– you learn a hell of a lot about yourself too. Kevin 2

Louisa is questioning her sense of efficacy as part of her identity and who she is.

It’s about finding yourself as a teacher actually – it’s really funny because we do it as people in life in all sorts of places but I think teaching’s like that too because it can be very much a profession where you can question yourself a lot and even be a bit down on yourself really like ‘am I actually being an effective teacher?’ Louisa 1

Kay describes how through deprivatising her teaching practice she is revealing her beliefs and her vulnerability in a public domain. She describes how through the dialogic process relational trust is built. She sees the process as personal and of value.

It’s because you’re having to share things about yourself, about your teaching. You get a
little bit precious about your teaching; you don’t like to think you have stuffed up or you’re not doing it right. Having these non-threatening conversations – it’s ok to say ‘hey this is not working for me.’ I think people get more and more comfortable. You actually get a lot out of it. Kay 1

Teaching is close to Kevin’s heart and in his role as a “kaiako” or teacher he is confronting his beliefs and assumptions about his own effectiveness. 

Shit - You learn a hell of a lot about yourself – you wake up in the middle of the night and think ‘oh shit I should have done this or I should have done that’ and I think that’s for me that’s the beauty of being a kaiako, being a teacher. I am not the most polished teacher in the world but I love it. Kevin 1

Louisa is taking responsibility for her own actions. She does not believe she needs the evaluative feedback of others. She is in control of her own professional learning and has a willingness and desire to extend herself. She is talking an agentic stance on her professional learning.

..that whole process it’s about my reflections on my teaching and rather than someone coming in and doing an appraisal and saying you know this is great, which they usually do, this is great, this is going great and it’s kind of like yeah but - I’ve never felt completely satisfied because I think as a professional you want to keep extending yourself and be the best you can be but how can you be that if I guess someone’s saying “that was great.” Louisa 2

Clive is taking an agentic stance on his inquiry. He is self-questioning his changing beliefs about how to teach and shifting the locus of control in his classroom.

How could I really, really get this to work? How can I really foster the children’s’ ability to promote their learning, control it, have a say in it, how can I set up a classroom to do that which is not the way I was trained? No way, back then. Clive 1

Making the Subject Object

Kegan & Laskow (2009) describe a subject-object relationship whereby any way of knowing can be determined by that which can be looked at (object) and that which can be looked through (the ‘filter’ or ‘lens’ to which it is subject.) Therefore, Kegan and Laskow assert that if we want to increase mental complexity, we need to move aspects of our meaning-making from subject to object, to alter our mindset so that a way of knowing or making meaning becomes a kind of ‘tool’ that we possess and can control or use, rather than something that controls us. The subject is invisible, what we look through, the way we view the world. When we move from subject to object, what was once an unconscious lens now becomes something that can be seen and reflected upon (Berger, 2006). Kegan (1994) writes, “We have object; we are subject.” (p.32) Things that are object in our lives are “those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon.” (p. 32)

In this research as the teachers participate in the reflective dialogue meetings they are responding and interacting from their subjective positioning. The subjectivity of their experience is at the forefront. When they view the DVD of themselves they are objectifying the conversation, able to recognise their metacognitive processes and think further on the meaning they make from it. When the teachers are talking they are “in the moment,” participating in the dialogue. When they
step back and have a second look they are no longer a participant. They are taking a dialectic stance, noticing the complexities of the interaction.

Ravenscroft, Wegerif and Hartley (2007) argue that both dialogic and dialectic processes are essential for stimulating thinking and creating the spaces where learning can happen. The relationship between these dimensions seems somewhat symbiotic in the pursuit of deep and meaningful learning. They describe a sociocultural approach where there are two notions of mediation, Vygotsky’s account of mediation by tools including words as sign-tools (dialectic) and Bakhtin’s account of mediation by the voices and perspectives of others (dialogic).

For each participant in a dialogue, the voice of the other is an outside perspective that includes them within it. The boundary between subjects is not therefore a demarcation line, or an external link between self and other, but an inclusive ‘space’ within which self and other mutually construct and reconstruct each other. (Ravenscroft, Wegerif and Hartley, 2007, p.44)

The teachers use the dialogic process to make meaning collaboratively and through the use of the video as a mediated tool, the dialectic process of meaning making occurs through their ‘second look.’

Andy is seeing himself in action. The tool enabled him to see that he was confident in his own voice. It was an opportunity for him to self-reflect and feedback to himself- through this interview.

_It was really interesting to watch myself I guess cause like everybody’s kind of self conscious but to watch it I did a really good job even though I wasn’t consciously trying to – I did a good job of listening. And my body language was really neat whereas I think I slouch here -not listening to the person – I’m alright. When it was my turn to speak I spoke well I felt – and I knew what I wanted to say._ Andy 1

Belinda could see and commented on her physical responses as she was challenged in her thinking. She saw the video as a record of her learning and an opportunity to notice the detail of what was going on for her.

_The body language. I could see where it was getting difficult. I was having to really think. How watching it and having to notice in a lot more detail, what was going on, and of course it’s a record of your next steps and where you’re going with it. It’s more meaningful and it gives a deeper picture._ Belinda 1

Like Belinda, Louisa also noticed her visual cues. She witnesses her thinking process.

_As I was talking I could see myself cause I know my own body language and even facial expressions. I knew I was thinking– I’m thinking on the spot now you know what mean and so I could see myself doing it._ Louisa 1

The mediated tool provided Kay with her next step. Through reviewing the DVD Kay identified that this second opportunity to reflect triggered her memory as it reminded her of what she wanted to accomplish in her teaching.

_It all came together sitting watching the DVD. Cause I did come up with a couple of extra steps I think on that day. And I left here. And I pretty much I mean what we talked I
forgot, you know. I was rushing off to the next thing. But sitting down watching the DVD it really it bought it all together and highlighted a couple of areas that I really need to work on to improve the lessons for the kids in my room. Kay 1

Kay used her computer to take notes as she viewed the DVD. She commented on the dialogic process she reviewed in the DVD and went on to outline her dialectic approach, ‘jotting things down’ and ‘cutting and pasting’ her electronic notes to make sense of what she was thinking. She was agentic; clarifying how she could take action.

It was while I was watching the DVD. This time there was a lot more…I was able to reach my goals during the interview with him better than last time but I still felt that actually having the video and watching it and just jotting things down; I was cutting and pasting and moving things around, that actually clarified it for me and I built on that’s what I discussed in the interview; this is what I could do to make that happen. So it was really good to have both parts of the process. Kay 2

The DVD enabled Kevin to reflect on the process of his thinking.

While I was talking on the video – it didn’t come out in the video but I was subconsciously realising where I was placing myself at that time – you know where I was within my overall working class. Kevin 1

Louisa saw how thinking is not a linear, direct process and can be slow and time consuming.

...what I noticed about myself is I talk round and round and round in cycles and then I go aaarh Louisa 1

I was watching my eyes and I could see my brain ticking over “Oh yeah that’s a good idea and then ooh how can I make that work in my classroom” and I could see that happening. Louisa 2

I could see myself in the video thinking oh, oh, what can I do next? What can I do next? So it was really neat watching me think. Yeah, just through that discussion - through that talk. That was really cool. Louisa 2

Belinda also found the process of thinking slow. When she looked at herself she saw that her realisation was a slow process, occurring through the dialogue.

It’s quite interesting actually watching through the video. Because at the start I knew exactly when I decided. But when you watch the video and I’m watching myself and seeing the thinking there. You can almost see the thought process happening because you know what’s happening or you think you do. Belinda 2

Through the second look Kevin reflected on the outcome of the reflective dialogue and realised that he had not followed through with his intention. This had an impact on his awareness as he realised that he needed to be more motivated.

It’s just trying to be able to get them. I think for me the point in the video where it really really hit home for me was when we were talking about motivation and questions. I can’t remember the exact dialogue what it was now, but I went away with a hiss and a roar as you do after and it petered out. For me that’s when it clicked in for me –that I have to be more motivated for myself and for them. Kevin 1
During the reflective dialogue meeting Kay was looking through her subjective eyes. The process of making the subject object through watching the DVD was a catalyst for Kay to further her thinking and determine the action she was going to take.

I actually found watching the DVD really enlightening. I found that when we were in here in the room you’re going over thinking about what happened and people are firing questions at you. I actually found watching the DVD more where I got to my next step than actually than when we were in here. Kay 1

Kay also recognised the dissonance between she said in the DVD and what she thought about it when she looked at what she had said. She was objectifying herself and grounding her espoused theories in practice.

and I was disagreeing with myself on the DVD – like you would ask me something and I was sitting and I was going ‘oh yeah that happens’ but when I was watching it I was thinking – ‘no it doesn’t actually’ Kay 1

Kay saw the value of double reflection, her second look. When she objectified her thinking she could see the process more clearly.

When you are watching yourself you can’t see all the clutter in your head but when you are actually talking – [you are] trying to think and talk at the same time. Kay 1

In the first look Kay had an inflexible view. During the process her peers asked questions to encourage her to engage in critical reflection. On second look she acknowledged her colleagues role in challenging her thinking.

I think when I was in here that time that I was sticking to my plan but then I could see that happening on the video and I was ‘oh hang on a minute’ they’re quite right on asking these questions cause that’s something I do need to think about. Kay 1

Andy is looking in from out and objectifying the subject.

[When I watched the DVD it was]not just through what I was saying. My body language and the way I listened cause obviously you have a funny idea of yourself looking out from your eyes – you don’t normally see in. Andy 1

In this second interview Belinda is theorising her process of seeing herself thinking. There were three things happening: reviewing data, processing data and talking about the data. Through this second look Belinda’s thinking became visible to her. She could see the direction of her thinking as a visual reminder.

Looking at the student voice and then, thinking about it and being asked, having to explain to somebody else. It’s all happening at the same time. What caused it was having to talk about it. I think, I would hate to see what is going on inside my head, because you’re speaking, but in the head and there’s lots of other things happening and we have to talk about it. Stop, think and I think I did a stop, think and you can see me on the video. That’s when -then having to speak it, articulate what I thought. Belinda 2

Belinda was able to make a connection with her colleague’s comments through having a fresh look.

...but it was watching the video of our dialogue about that. That was really powerful
cause you can’t, well I can’t, remember everything that I’ve said or things that. Watching the video I could see the point where I was thinking that, and where the train of thought was going and where the conversation was going. You could see why it went that way.
Belinda 2

Clive described how the second look process enabled him to make the shift from subject to object.

...um I heard her say it that day but it didn’t give me a jolt me then ...but having the time to look at the video later/ the film later - it was a different context cause it’s more intense-cause I guess your brains in a different place - you are listening but you are watching something on the screen. Clive 1

...because you are removed - take the cameras back and you have that birds eye view on what’s been said rather than actually being part of the discussion, you are one step back from the discussion. Clive 1

Today you were one step removed and that’s actually very interesting aye you are an observer not a participant. Clive 1

Conclusion
A dialogic approach is integral to this professional learning process. By problematising practice through collaborative inquiry and critically reflecting on evidence, practitioners can reclaim their professionalism, targeting improvement which is specifically linked to the socio-cultural environments of their classrooms, schools and communities. An instrumentalist approach to learning and assessment promotes a proletarianisation of teachers which results in loss of autonomy and professionalism within teaching (Harris, 1990, as cited in Willis, 1994). The groups of teacher participants in this research have been positioned as the ‘knowers’ through a process of dialogical feedback with in the collaborative research settings, challenging the traditional view of the advisor as an ‘expert’ imparting knowledge. In the interests of sustainable practice we also encourage school leaders to take this stance.

This approach is culturally responsive to the differing dispositions of participants and the contexts in which these teachers work. Apple (1991) suggests that critical intellectuals need to shift their roles from being universalising spokespersons to cultural workers whose task is to take away barriers that prevent people from speaking for themselves. In keeping with this approach the decision was made to include teacher voice in this paper. It is important to note however, that the empowerment suggested by such a view is a process that one undertakes for oneself; it is not something done to or for someone else: “The heart of the idea of empowerment involves people coming into a sense of their own power, a new relationship with their own contexts.” (Fox, 1888, cited in Lather, 1991) This has relevance for how leaders broker power in their schools.

Teachers in this study questioned their beliefs and struggled with their own perceptions of their effectiveness. Imposed accountability encourages smoke screens whereas real accountability is transparent. Real accountability comes from the genuine attempts to deepen understandings about teaching and learning through inquiry and research, in an atmosphere of collaboration and trust (Reid, 2004). Top-down schooling improvement practices can describe teaching less as an intellectual activity and more as a standardised, mechanical, and utterly passive mode of training.
Teachers and communities devoid of their capacity to use their own ideas, judgments, and initiative in matters of importance can’t teach their children to do so (Giroux, 2003). Through empowering the community from within leaders can enhance the creative power of teachers’ collaboration.

Our findings suggest that collaborative reflection has the potential to support groups of teachers to self-transform. Dialogic learning relationships are integral to this process, as social inquiry involves engaging in talk that is challenging and critical. The teachers were able to clarify their thinking through talking. They made connections with the practice of others, scaffolding their ideas through the contributions of others. The awareness of the collegial lens structured the way the participants thought and spoke about their practice. The teachers noted that their thinking was enhanced by the collaborative aspect.

Teacher participants described how their personal and professional identities were interwoven; how they viewed themselves as teachers and how they saw themselves as people. Through this process they questioned their personal beliefs. The teachers took ownership, initiating and innovating in their learning and their teaching practice in order to develop student assessment for learning.

The use of the DVD as a mediated tool enabled the teachers to ascend to a different level in their professional learning, to see their own process of reflection and extend their thinking further. This opportunity for second look, second think has implications for models of professional development. The DVD reinforced the teachers’ learning goals and supported further thinking through the objectification of the initial reflective dialogue. The process itself supported teachers to move subject to object, surfaced the invisible and critiquing assumptions through a process of critical reflection.

The capacity for dialogue challenged teachers to go beyond themselves to take a shared role for the responsibility for the learning of the group. A dialogical process can support leaders and teachers to see other perspectives. Our findings support this view of collaborative dialogue as a process that enables teachers to take an agentic stance on their own learning.

References


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