

## Teacher talk and pupil talk: a case study of a thinking skills approach to learning in an English primary academy

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TEACHER TALK AND PUPIL TALK: A CASE STUDY OF A THINKING SKILLS  
APPROACH TO LEARNING IN AN ENGLISH PRIMARY ACADEMY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of  
Wolverhampton for the degree of Doctor of Education in Professional Inquiry

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an exploratory case study of how talk is used by teachers and pupils through a thinking skills approach to learning in a primary academy. It investigates the inter-relationship between curriculum and pedagogy using lesson observations, interviews with teachers and pupil focus groups.

Findings suggest that an enquiry-oriented approach to curriculum, together with a dialogic stance amongst teachers, can result in an emancipatory consciousness-raising experience for children (Freire, 1974). Using the techniques of *Philosophy for Children*, pupils develop their understanding by bringing their life experiences to bear on curricular topics studied. Reflecting together in small group and whole class discussions, facilitated by teachers, enables them to give voice to their ideas and build on those of others, corresponding to the development of 'communicative competence' (Habermas, 1984). Children's development of criticality is seen to be enhanced in this approach to learning by the gradual introduction of conceptual or abstract vocabulary. However, a corollary is the risk that some may not engage in spoken enquiries or indeed that this curriculum may not provide them with the skills to achieve as well in national tests. An essential requirement of this counter cultural approach to teaching is the adoption of a fallibilist stance by teachers in discussion with children. Classroom relationships, which reduce the social distance and develop a more symmetrical power balance, foster collaboration and a sense of classroom community.

The study concludes with implications for teacher education and professional development, namely: curriculum planning which takes account of pupils' own experiences and capital; opportunities for children to develop their communicative competence which forges links between everyday and school language; and teacher focus on praxis, acting wisely and carefully in a particular situation.

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## **Glossary**

CPR Cambridge Primary Review

EAL English as an Additional Language

EEF Education Endowment Foundation

ERA Education Reform Act

IAPC Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children

IRF Initiation response Feedback

LLE Local leader in Education

NFER National Foundation for Educational Research

NLE National Leader in Education

NLS National Literacy Strategy

NNS National Numeracy Strategy

NPQH National Professional Qualification for Headship

NQT Newly Qualified Teacher

Ofsted The Office for Standards in Education

P4C Philosophy for Children

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

PSHE Personal, Social and Health Education

QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

RE Religious Education

SATs Standardised Assessment Tasks

SAPERE Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education

SCITT School-Centred Initial Teacher Training

SLCN Speech, Language and Communication Needs

ZPD Zone of Proximal (or Potential) Development

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the study. It identifies the issue, aims and purpose of the research, outlines the methodology and provides a brief summary of different aspects of the context. A concluding section gives an overview of how the thesis is organised and a statement of the initial research questions. All names in the study are pseudonyms.

## 1.1 Issue, aims and purpose

This thesis investigates how talk is used in a primary classroom in the light of the use of the thinking skills programme, *Philosophy for Children* (P4C) (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980; Lipman, 2003). It examines curriculum, teachers' pedagogical practices, and classroom relationships. It is an exploratory case study which seeks to understand the phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 1993). As a teacher educator, with a background in primary school teaching and leadership, and with a specific interest in talk and its use in classroom pedagogy, the exploration of this specific case appealed to me at both an intellectual and practical level. In seeking to understand the case, and what was occurring (Stake, 2003), I felt I would gain insights that would develop my understanding but also be of value more widely. The way that the school had devised its own 'concept-led' curriculum and integrated practices from P4C appeared exciting and innovative, offering both choice and agency to pupils in their learning and the opportunity to reflect on their own life experiences, unusual in my experience across many classrooms in England in diverse settings. What the school was doing merited further investigation which I felt would help inform my practice and have a positive impact on the students I teach. More widely, I felt that the detailed illumination I could offer through this case study may have implications for primary education in general in the areas of curriculum design, pedagogy and classroom relationships. But it may also have implications for initial and continuing teacher education and, potentially, more widely for the education sector in general.

## **1.2 Research venue and rationale for the methodology**

The venue for the research was a primary academy in a northern English city, described in more detail in the next section. Its choice was largely serendipitous. A developing interest in P4C had led me to conduct some work with students. I had undergone training in the programme, as interpreted by the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERRE). I was returning from their annual conference on a train when a conversation with another delegate led me to visit her school. The approach to classroom talk and the promotion of pupil voice, alongside the 'concept-based' curriculum that I saw there, piqued my interest. I felt I had seen something different happening and I wanted to discover more. So the school became my research venue.

A case study approach to my enquiry seemed to be the natural route to take, as I wanted to explore the everyday context of teaching and learning in its natural setting. I wanted the case to tell its own story (Coles, 1989; Carter, 1993). An exploratory case study allows the researcher to use a range of tools to gather and examine data but also entails sensitivity to the different contexts - social, cultural and political (Stake, 2003). My aim was not necessarily to draw conclusions, but to understand educational action. It therefore accords with the second part of Stenhouse's definition of an 'Educational Case Study' when he describes the aims of many educational researchers who use case study methods as being,

concerned to enrich the thinking and discourse of educators either by the development of educational theory or by refinement of prudence through the systematic and reflective documentation of evidence (1988, p.49).

## **1.3 Context**

### **Spoken language**

Nearly fifty years ago, the Bullock report (Bullock, 1975) made the case for the importance of spoken language as an object of learning in its own right in classrooms in England. Yet these recommendations never really took root and talk has not featured significantly in successive versions of the English National

Curriculum (DES, 1989; DfEE, 1999a; DfE, 2013). This is despite the relatively influential, although short-lived, National Oracy Project (1987-1993) and international validation of communication as one of the OECD's (2005) key competencies. A key argument for the inclusion of a spoken language component in classrooms is the link between proficiency in this area and subsequent outcomes in education and employment (Knight, 2020). A strand of research from the 1970s onwards has also identified a social class dimension to linguistic conventions which can restrict access to classroom language for some children (Bernstein, 1973; Heath, 1983; Hart and Risley, 1995).

More recently the Bercow report found that approximately 7% of children entering school at five years of age had Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) which includes difficulties 'forming sounds and words, formulating sentences, understanding what others say and using language socially' (Bercow, 2008, p.14). The Centre for Social Justice (2014) found children with SLCN are significantly more likely to come from economically disadvantaged areas, with a suggestion that SLCN within this group could be as high as 50%. Clear predictive links between SLCN and later academic achievement, mental health difficulties and involvement with the criminal justice system (The Early Intervention Foundation, 2017) render children with these needs at the greatest risk of social exclusion.

Another constituency for consideration is those children in Britain today for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). In 2019, 21.2% of children in primary schools and 16.9% of pupils in secondary schools were recorded as having a first language that is known or believed to be other than English (DfE, 2019a). These figures are considerably higher than a decade earlier where 14.4% of pupils in primary schools and 10.8% of secondary school pupils had a first language other than English (DCSF, 2008). Data from national test results indicate that children who have English as a first language experience higher rates of educational attainment than children learning EAL at each stage of education (NALDIC 2021). This pattern of relative underachievement suggests that current educational practice is failing to meet the literacy needs of children learning EAL (NALDIC, 2021). Many of these children experience significantly lower levels of English vocabulary knowledge relative to their monolingual, English-speaking peers (Cameron, 2003). Weaker

language skills are likely to have a significant impact on the ability to understand (Stuart, 2004).

## **Philosophy for Children**

*Philosophy for Children* is a school-based approach which aims to develop children's ability to think rationally about issues such as truth, fairness and justice (Lord et al., 2021). Children are not taught philosophical knowledge, but encouraged to generate opinions and arguments and discuss topics. It develops their thinking skills, confidence in communication and ability to respectfully listen to and consider the views of others. It has been used in the UK for over twenty years, developed from the establishment of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) in USA in 1970 by the originator of the movement, Matthew Lipman (Siddiqui, Gorard and See, 2019). The approach is now used internationally and P4C, or something like it, has been adopted in approximately sixty countries across the world (Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999). In UK, SAPERE, a non-profit society, was set up in 1992 to promote the use of P4C in schools through training teachers and an accredited award scheme. For Siddiqui, Gorard and See (2019), P4C can be seen as part of a worldwide approach to critical thinking which has brought changes to teaching and the overall purpose of school education. It does not have any specified materials or stimuli; lesson steps outlined in training are only a guide to how to proceed and may be adapted as the teacher becomes more confident. Not all stages need to be completed in a single lesson and it is common practice for a question to be chosen for discussion in one lesson, and discussed in the next. The programme is estimated to be used currently in around 3000 primary or secondary schools in the UK (Lord et al., 2019) and SAPERE recommends one sixty minute lesson per week within curriculum time for children within Key Stage 1 or 2 (Lord et al., 2021). As an absolute minimum, this could be once every two weeks, but the weekly model is preferred. Lessons can be stand-alone or embedded within the school curriculum. The school in this study used both approaches. They had originally adopted P4C and taught it as a standalone lesson. They later integrated it within the taught curriculum, using an approach which values children's independence and agency through a curriculum designed to take account of the local circumstances and community needs (See Chapter 5). In my experience this approach of integrating

P4C across the curriculum, and specifically into English and the Humanities lessons, was novel. I had only ever seen schools teach P4C as a discrete lesson and I had also often found that it would be missed out if the teacher was short of time, in favour of national curriculum subjects.

## **The school**

The context of the case is a primary academy in a northern English city. For the sake of this research study, and to protect anonymity, it will be known as St. Luke's. The school is situated close to the city centre in the second most deprived ward and serves a diverse community. It is a larger than average primary school with 465 children on roll. There are two classes in each year group and the current Ofsted rating is 'Outstanding' (January 2017). It is a Christian faith school. However, not all pupils are from a Christian faith background. Many from the local community are Muslim. Data at the inspection in 2017 showed that the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, or who speak English as an additional language, was well above the national average, as was the proportion of those known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium. This is consistent with the local community, many of whom have Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic ethnicity (above 60%). The number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with an education and health care plan was also above the national average. The school hosts regular visits from groups of teachers from other schools to observe practice as several staff members are local or national leads in education.

The school classrooms share many features with those in a typical primary school. There are interactive whiteboards, pupil trays and display boards. Each has a theme. In a year two classroom there is a rainforest, in a year six classroom a deck from the Titanic and in another a Georgian dining table complete with candelabras and items of silver cutlery. However, the most striking difference between these and classrooms in other primary schools is the absence of pupil desks or tables. One year five classroom, in particular, creates a surreal impression as it has an entire table and stools attached to the ceiling upside down. During observation visits, I have seen children gathered in groups at the tables or work surfaces or working individually. Where they have been writing, they have used the table surface, the floor or their knees to rest on. I was told that this innovation had begun two years

previously when the school ran a pilot for a year with two classes. The deputy head teacher later confirmed this, stating that teachers' initial fear was that it would encourage the children to 'fuss'. Yet these fears were unfounded, he said, and lessons were calm and purposeful. The more responsibility the pupils were given for choosing whom to work with, where to work and what materials to use, the better they responded.

### **Personal and professional**

The context of this research is also aligned with my own personal and professional biography. As a white middle class boy who won a place at a grammar school in the 1970s and later attended University to study Latin and Greek, I am aware of a degree of privilege. In my professional life, I have worked for eighteen years in primary education and fifteen years in higher education as a teacher educator. I have a commitment to social justice, whether it be through working to eradicate disadvantage in primary education or to widen participation in higher education. I have had many different roles from classroom teacher to head teacher and course leader to head of department for primary teacher education. In both private and professional life, I have always prized the spoken word. I speak several European languages, have taught in Italy and Greece for a total of five years and worked with colleagues in higher education institutions in Spain and Belgium. Spoken communication has always been at the forefront of my work, whether responding to a developing learning situation in the classroom, mediating between social workers, police and parents in child protection case conferences, or feeding back to a student teacher after a lesson observation to enable her to emerge with self-respect and evaluate her teaching and children's progress. I feel that an ability to listen and sensitivities to the subtleties of the spoken and written word are necessary for good communication. And, ultimately, education is about communication.

I left primary education because I could no longer in all conscience support the climate that years of political micro-management and a damaging accountability culture had created. Although I believe there were significant advances during this time, towards the end I felt I had compromised my ideals, teaching to a centrally prescribed curriculum and pedagogy (see chapter 2 for a discussion of changing education policy). Disappointingly, this sense of 'ontological insecurity' (Ball, 2016,

p.1054) has accompanied me into higher education. Once again, my sense of what is right is challenged by what is measured, and I am unsettled by questioning in whose interests I am acting. The centrally prescribed government set of Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011a), and the more recent Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019b), have almost no mention of the importance of young children's spoken language development. My sense of unease and anxiety, what Lazzarato calls the 'micro-politics of little fears' (2009, p.12), is still with me. These feelings, 'the conflict between instrumental and ontological reflection' (Williams, Gumtau and Karousou, 2008, p.22), have led me to adopt a position of 'resistance' to neoliberal governmentality (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). I try to be true to my own values by, for example, making it clear to my students that there are different representations of social reality.

My first venture into P4C involved developing the skills of three newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in a school in the Midlands. This small-scale research project formed the pilot for this thesis. In encouraging them to see how they could think differently about pedagogy and develop pupils' turn-taking and reasoning skills, I was also hoping to enable them to see teaching as more than a technical skill of 'delivering the curriculum', all too easy in an educational climate of measurement by outcome. The project yielded some successes, notably when two of the participants questioned whether they were 'teaching' at all, when facilitating philosophical enquiries with their children, reflecting their own notions of what they understood the role of 'teacher' to entail.

My belief in the double-edged power of language to either develop or constrain thinking derives from a reading of Gramsci (1979), whose concept of hegemony encompasses the notion of discourse saturating society to the extent that it constitutes the substance and limits of common sense (Jones, 2006). My own lived experience of the drip-feed of the language of neoliberalism into my daily professional life (for a fuller discussion see chapter 2) - the everyday usage of what Pring (2004, pp. 25-26) describes as 'a new set of metaphors and different ways of describing and evaluating educational activities' - has caused me to reflect upon a repositioning of the relationship between teacher and learner. I feel that listening to pupils' voices and hearing about their life experiences has been devalued by a discourse which emphasises the importance of meeting measurable outcomes.

These feelings have been influential in the formation of my research positioning. My personal positioning derives from a belief that my understanding of the world is not 'given' by what Dewey (1938) calls objective conditions, it is 'taken' by me. It is a direct relation of the world out there, which I can never fully know, and what I bring to it, as discussed in more detail in chapter 4. In the context of this research study, I sought to better understand the lived experiences of pupils and staff in the research venue, which forms the 'case' of my case study and so, by patient and qualitative analysis, illuminate understanding. The outcomes of the research have been useful in understanding a way of teaching which may be described as counter-cultural, thus contributing to professional knowledge and practice, as discussed in chapter 6, 'Conclusions and Recommendations'.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

My initial research questions derived from the pilot study and focussed on the effects on teacher pedagogy and child agency of the use of P4C. Over the course of the research they developed and changed as discussed in the literature review (chapter 3). The initial questions were,

- 1) What are the effects on teacher pedagogy of using a thinking skills approach to teaching with a focus on talk?
- 2) What are the effects on child agency of using a thinking skills approach to teaching with a focus on talk?
- 3) What are the implications of these findings for the professional development of teachers?

## **1.5 Organisation and Structure of the study**

The thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter 2 is an overview of current and recent educational policy and educational discourse, necessary for an appreciation of the context in which teachers are working and teacher educators, like myself, are preparing teachers of the future. Chapter 3 provides a review of the literature, with a specific focus on dialogic pedagogy, which values talk and high levels of pupil participation. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how thinking skills

programmes, and particularly P4C, align with dialogic pedagogy. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the research design and methodology, which is underpinned by my positioning as a researcher, which, in turn, has influenced my view of the case. Chapter 5 draws out and analyses key themes arising from the data in the light of the literature reviewed. I analyse what I understand about the case, what it is telling me and, by implication, what the reader is vicariously experiencing. In chapter 6, I draw conclusions based on the findings and analysis in answer to the research questions.

## Chapter 2: Recent Policy and Discourse in Education

This chapter aims to contextualise current educational practice. It considers the reforms enacted in education policy at a national level and the impact this has had on curriculum and pedagogy with a specific focus on talk in the curriculum. The nature and changes in educational discourse are then considered, with a view to their impact on teachers.

### 2.1 Policy

#### Reforms

Education policy has been described as ‘The raft of laws and initiatives that determine the shape and functioning of the educational systems at both national and local level’ (Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2011, p. 54). Such legislation cannot be considered without attention to the social arena or field in which education takes place (Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor, 2005). The concept of a social field, developed by Bourdieu, involves competition, power and domination. The various actors in a social space all struggle for the transformation or preservation of a field (1998 pp. 40-41). According to this view, education policy is the product of an unequal and multi-layered social process operating at global, national and local levels that aims to preserve or alter educational ideologies, institutions or practices. By this account, teachers’ agency for change within the classroom is limited by the social, political and economic context they work within (Olsen, Codd and O’Neil, 2004; O’Riordan 2013).

Education policy in England has undergone significant changes over the last forty years at a structural level but also in regard to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The Ruskin College speech of the Labour prime-minister James Callaghan, in 1976, is widely seen as a pivotal moment, initiating the ‘Great Debate’ about the nature and purpose of public education (Matheson, 2015). Although the gestation period was long, the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) (DES, 1988), enacted by a Conservative administration, was the first in a series of changes to the sector resulting from this debate. Widely seen as the most far-reaching set of reforms since the 1944 Education Act, the ERA changed structural elements of the

system introducing local management of schools, wresting some power and responsibility from local authorities. There were also changes to curriculum. At a stroke, it took away the teaching profession's responsibility for deciding what should be taught to pupils of compulsory school age in England and Wales (Menter *et al.*, 2015). It introduced a national curriculum and assessment, monitoring and reporting arrangements for pupil learning with tests at age seven, eleven and thirteen. It was only a short period of time before results were published and schools ranked by league tables. The ERA was seen by some as an unprecedented incursion of the state into an area of public life and, in the words of Bash and Coulby (1989, p.1) 'fundamentally and probably irreversibly transformed the nature of state education'. The ideological driver was the belief that by creating a market where schools were competing for custom, with league tables and examination results for comparison, the stronger would flourish while the weaker were forced to close. For Green (1999), these policy decisions at a national level were part of 'A clear policy convergence within Europe and East Asia around a range of broad policy themes...' (p.69). The 1980s and 1990s began to see industrialised nations view education as a primary mechanism for maintaining a competitive advantage in the global economy. Many subsequent reforms stemmed from the belief that market forces and increased competition achieve greater efficiency in the allocation of resources, otherwise known as economic rationalism or neo-liberalism (Exley and Ball, 2014).

The number and pace of reforms introduced by different administrations through the 1990s and 2000s were at times hard to keep up with. Over an eight-year period from 2000 to 2008, for example, 459 National Strategy documents were issued in Literacy alone (Moss, 2007). Although with the advent of the 2010 Education Act, 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) and the revised National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), the pace and frequency of new curricular initiatives seemed to have slowed, the extent of political control did not. Curriculum is still determined by central government and, although academy and free schools have the legal right to opt out of the National Curriculum, testing and assessment arrangements still apply and primary schools as well as secondary schools are judged by their results which are published. In fact, the coalition government (2010-2015) implemented further control mechanisms, widely seen to 'raise the bar' for school performance (Bartlett and Burton, 2016). They raised the so-called 'floor' targets for schools, reformed

performance tables to set out higher expectations, introduced performance-related pay for teachers, and changed Ofsted gradings, replacing the former judgement of 'Satisfactory' with 'Requires Improvement'. Indeed, schools that received this grade were given a year to improve and if they did not would be forced to convert to academy status.

Changes at a structural level were equally significant. Encouraged by financial incentives and the promise of greater autonomy, many schools became academies - over half of all secondary schools and nearly a third of primaries by the general election of 2015. Thus the role of local authorities diminished, as they were only responsible for a very few essential functions for academy schools, but the role of central government in England increased (West, 2015). Indeed, the range and number of different school types has significantly increased, as have the possible ways to train as a teacher. Some see this fragmentation and some of its manifestations, such as academies and free schools, as further pursuit of a market-driven ideology, leading to a 'quasi-privatised' system (Wilkins, 2015, p. 1143). Policies under all recent governments, whether Labour, Liberal-Conservative coalition or more recently Conservative, have perpetuated the neo-liberal belief that freedom from local authority control and increased competition would lead to a rise in standards. The evidence, however, does not seem to support this belief. Neither Gorard (2014) nor Stewart (2015) found that academies were any more successful at raising standards than either the schools they have replaced or compete with. But most troubling for social justice is the suggestion by Harris *et al.* (2003) that the models of change adopted by schools during this period, ultimately decided by Ofsted reports and SATs results, created,

a new social geography of divisive improvement that [offered] professional learning communities to the advantaged and [imposed] performance training sects on the rest (Harris *et al.*, 2003, p.191).

The first national curriculum was seen by some to favour middle class groups (Ball, 2003), whilst others accused it of having heavy social, cultural and linguistic bias (Gillborn, 2001). Their concern was the focus on English History that stopped at the end of the Second World War, with little consideration of the decline of the Empire or representation of minority communities, and a focus on the study of British literature in the English syllabus. Such criticisms can equally, and perhaps more forcefully, be

levelled against the revised national curriculum, introduced by the then Conservative-Liberal coalition Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove in 2013, with the promise that pupils would be 'introduced to the best that has been thought and said' (DfE, 2013, p.6). The strong narrative of traditionalism, promoting a firmly conservative ideology (by expecting all children to learn all their times tables by aged nine, learn to recite traditional poetry by heart and study mainly European white history in chronological order, for example), draws criticism even from objective commentators. Bartlett and Burton, for example, note its resemblance to '[the curriculum] studied by Coalition ministers in their own school days' (2016, p.133).

The government narrative for the introduction of the revised national curriculum was, as with its predecessor, based on the assumption of a strong link between educational achievement and economic performance. Great use was made of England's falling place in international league tables, termed 'PISA panic' by some (Alexander, 2010). The official announcement of a curriculum review, shortly after the new government took office, clearly stated that it would 'replace the current standard curriculum with one based on the best school systems in the world' (DfE, 2011b).

### **Impact on pedagogy and curriculum balance**

Although initially there was no intrusion into pedagogy as a result of the ERA and the newly introduced first national curriculum, things were soon to change. The National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies (DfEE, 1998; DfEE, 1999b) introduced by New Labour, with the avowed intent of raising standards, became infamous for dictating pedagogy, prescribing not only what to teach, term by term and week by week, but how to teach it. The attempt at centralised control from government, or 'state pedagogy' as some termed it, supported by an apparatus of Ofsted inspections, national strategy managers and new teacher training requirements was designed to ensure compliance. This accountability culture has been likened by some to Foucault's reference to Bentham's 'panopticon' (Mills, 2003), to represent the exercise of power throughout society, where surveillance operates at many levels.

A corollary to the focus on literacy and numeracy, but arguably stemming directly from it, was the perceived narrowing of the curriculum. For, despite a statement in

section 351 of the Education Act 1996, requiring all schools to 'provide a balanced and broadly-based curriculum' (DfEE 1999a, p.12), research and inspection evidence confirmed what teachers were reporting - an increased focus and time spent on English and mathematics at the expense of other curriculum areas (Webb and Vulliamy, 2006; Boyle and Bragg, 2008). This was despite reports from Ofsted which seemed to show that schools with a richer and broader curriculum consistently gained better test results in mathematics and English (Ofsted 1997, 2002). The situation seemed particularly marked in schools deemed by Ofsted to be in need of improvement or requiring special measures (Alexander, 2010).

The Cambridge Primary Review (CPR), launched in 2006, and published in 2010 (Alexander, 2010), the most comprehensive independent enquiry into primary education since Plowden (CACE, 1967), reported many respondents' concerns with curriculum overload and a loss of breadth and balance. Further significant concerns were 'a pedagogy that rates transmission as more important than the pursuit of knowledge in its wider sense' (2010, p.251) and the loss of professional flexibility and autonomy as a result of over-prescription, micro-management and accountability. It is easy to conclude that a didactic pedagogy, reliant on the transmission of information from teacher to pupil, and the 'valuing of memorisation and recall over understanding and enquiry' (2010, p.251) came about as a result of the accountability culture and a tendency to 'teach to the test'. However, others would suggest that this approach has been a feature of our education system since its inception (Cuban, 1990, 2004; Robinson, 2015). This interpretation sees the latest reforms as merely the perpetuation of an approach which has held sway since compulsory schooling was introduced, where organisation of time and space, pupil groupings and subject-focused instruction are taken for granted. These cultural expectations of what constitutes 'real education', lead Tyack and Tobin (1994) to coin the phrase 'the grammar of schooling', a grammar which they see as remarkably resilient to change, despite notable attempts to reform it.

The CPR recommended an outline for a new curriculum which acknowledged the 'centrality of language, oracy and literacy' (2010, p.265) drawing together fourteen areas to be pursued in primary education. The twelve aims were to be matched with eight 'domains of knowledge, skills, disposition and enquiry' (2010, p.265). Personal development was a constant thread which ran through all other areas. Citizenship

and ethics, noticeable by its absence in the reformed national curriculum (DfE, 2013), was included as a subject in its own right. It also recommended that schools should be able to devote a third of curriculum time to studies relevant to the needs of the community. Renewed importance should be placed on the arts and humanities and oracy be given a central position in the curriculum 'that its centrality to learning, culture and life requires' (2010, p.268). In one of its proposed aims, 'Enacting dialogue' it exhorted schools to,

advance a pedagogy in which dialogue is central: between self and others, between personal and collective knowledge, between present and past, between different ways of making sense (2010, p.199).

### **The place of talk in the curriculum**

The first national curriculum in England (DES, 1988; DfEE, 1999a) included 'Speaking and Listening' as a separate attainment target within the English programme of study. It contained guidance for teachers on 'Knowledge, Skills and Understanding', covering six areas including, 'group discussion and interaction' where, as one of the objectives, children should be taught to,

talk effectively as members of a group; make reasoned and evaluative comments; justify what they think after listening to others' questions or accounts; and deal politely with opposing points of view and enable discussion to move on (DfEE, 1999a, p. 50).

Yet, despite the focus on the 'basics' of English and mathematics, the spoken word was never assessed. Although it was always a significant element of the Foundation Stage Curriculum, it did not hold equal prominence with reading and writing for children at key stage one and two. With the focus of teaching shifting to the requirements of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (DfEE, 1998), its status was further eroded. Indeed, the NLS seemed almost completely to ignore the important role of talk in children's developing understanding, with a rigid focus on 'Word level, Sentence level and Text level' work. The only mention of the spoken word was a sort of 'tag on' in two sentences in a paragraph entitled 'What is Literacy?' in the introduction (DfEE, 1998, p.3).

A decade after the introduction of the NLS, and in response to the work of the Cambridge Primary Review, the Labour government launched its own curriculum

review led by Sir Jim Rose. The resultant proposals (DCSF, 2009) recommended six broad areas of learning in place of a subject-based curriculum, not dissimilar to the recommendations of the CPR. 'Understanding English, communication and languages' contained a strand devoted to Speaking and Listening including statements such as 'Children should be taught to use dialogue in discussion to build up and refine ideas collaboratively in groups' (DCSF, 2009, p.29). Although it did not give the status attributed to spoken language by the CPR, there were suggestions that dialogue would play a central part in learning. Yet this was the curriculum that never was, because on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010 the new Conservative-Liberal coalition government took office and made it clear that they would not be proceeding with the recommendations of the Rose review. The revised national curriculum took several years to come into being but the education white paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) criticised its predecessor as 'squeezing out room for innovation, creativity, deep learning and intellectual exploration' (p.40). An expert panel, appointed to advise on the curriculum review, recommended a reduction in content and the number of subjects to be statutorily assessed. The ensuing report (DfE, 2011b), devoted an entire chapter to oral language arguing for the acknowledgement of the importance of this area, based on, 'a compelling body of evidence that highlights a connection between oral development, cognitive development and educational attainment' (2011b, p.52). In a clear echo of the CPR recommendations, it advocated that schools should be free to include subjects and topics in the most effective way possible, specifically citing P4C, thinking skills and a commitment to lifelong learning as focuses that could be included in a discrete or cross-curricular way (2011b, p.21).

Unfortunately, the review did not deliver on this and other recommendations and it dissolved with the withdrawal of three of the members of the panel of four. Andrew Pollard, one of these, became vocally critical, suggesting that the new curriculum was, 'fatally flawed' (Pollard, 2012). He believed the greatest influence on the new curriculum was the early work of an American educator E.D. Hirsch (1987), which appealed to an 'essential knowledge' mantra, close to the heart of the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, and School's Minister, Nick Gibb. For Pollard the new curriculum and additional testing arrangements did not take account of the

needs of the pupil or provide teachers with the scope to exercise professional judgement.

Whatever the views of individual educationalists, the revised curriculum, when published, contained very detailed year-by-year specifications in English, mathematics and science, but only broad outline statements for other subjects. Once again, Speaking and Listening, known in the revised orders as 'Spoken Language', was scarcely mentioned. Out of eighty-six pages devoted to English, it occupies scarcely more than a page. There are twelve bullet points designed to cover the statutory requirements for teaching this curriculum area between years one and six. With new tests in phonics and grammar to focus on, it soon became clear that teachers would need to spend their time developing their own understanding of the more abstruse aspects of English grammar, rather than spoken language.

## **2.2 Educational discourse**

Inextricable from the changes outlined above is the shift in the discourse used in the education sector as part of what is often termed neoliberalism. The incremental effects of gradual changes in language as a direct result of the introduction of the neoliberal reform processes, what Ball identifies as 'Market, management and performance' (2016, p.1049) are, I would argue, an example of Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Here power - in this case the new vocabularies of practice and measurement - saturates society and 'even constitutes the substance and limit of common sense for most people' (Williams, 1980, p.37).

Various described as 'technocratic rationality' (Giroux and McClaren, 1985), 'thinking in business terms' (Pring, 2004), managerialism' (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005), or 'performativity' (Lyotard, 1984; Ball, 2016), views of the process yield a remarkable degree of consensus from scholars of different persuasions. The change in discourse has, over time, recast the educational enterprise. A new set of metaphors - different ways of describing and evaluating educational activities - reposition the relationship between teacher and learner. The theme of teacher being 'deliverer' (deliver being the verb of choice for successive iterations of the National Curriculum), the student being 'client' or 'stakeholder', and of education being a

series of 'measurable outcomes', mean the entire process is conceived in terms of 'effectiveness' or 'efficiency'. At the heart of the change is a curriculum which conforms to what is often termed a behavioural objectives model (Tyler, 1949). Knowledge is regarded as something to be selected and distributed, the curriculum divided into a set of subjects, and pupils to be assessed on how much they have assimilated its content. It is an approach that seems to encapsulate what Freire described as the 'banking concept' (1970), equating the role of the teacher as making a deposit in the account of the learner. Attention is necessarily deflected away from aspects of social, emotional and moral development, as they do not have measurable performance value (Ball, 2016). The impact of these changes on educational discourse is profound. There is less room for the teacher to respond to the needs of the learner and even, I would argue, to individual sense-making. Little significance or credit is attached to creative or deviant responses as these are not envisaged within the 'assessment criteria' or mark schemes (Pring, 2004). Challenge is discouraged, or at least not invited. The pastoral aspects of teaching are thereby seen by some to be diminished with implications for social equity (Braun, 2017).

In a similar way, in teacher education, students who have been encouraged to think of themselves as objects on a trajectory to achieve their target grades throughout their schooling, are required to meet a set of competencies, the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011a). This expectation tends, in my experience, to encourage them to conceptualise their role as carrying out a set of specific functions. There is little mention in the statements of the importance of their own formation and development of particular dispositions or ways of thinking (Biesta, 2013). The regulation of teacher education to ensure compliance (Ofsted's vocabulary of choice) to these standards has been reinforced recently by a curriculum, the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019b), which, if not followed, results in failure in an Ofsted inspection. This characterisation of teacher education as a set of skills to be learned is perhaps best exemplified by successive government's insistence on using the word 'training'. As discussed over twenty-five years ago by Newman (1996), this coinage forms part of the ongoing view of many on the political right that teacher education has no place in the University. The challenge for teacher educators, such as myself, is to encourage teachers to see themselves as public intellectuals. The intention is to rediscover a moral dimension which situates the role of the educator

as community building, humanitarian, and democratic. It needs to reposition learning as the serious engagement with ideas, and the struggle to make sense, not a means to an end, but as an enterprise where the ends cannot be disconnected from the means (Pring, 2004). Indeed, as Dewey argued, the so-called 'end' should become the 'means' to yet further thinking, to the pursuit of further goals (1938).

## **2.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the ways in which changes in policy have affected curriculum, pedagogy and discourse within the primary education sector in recent decades. Education policy in England has been influenced by globalisation and the ideology of the governments of the time, although all of these have subscribed to what is often termed neo-liberalism, seeing education as a primary mechanism for maintaining a competitive advantage in the global economy. Significant changes to the structure of the system, as well as curriculum and assessment regimes, have created a culture of accountability epitomised by the publication of school league tables and a punitive inspection regime. As a result, a culture of 'teaching to the test' has become embedded, with schools focusing on the 'basics' of English and mathematics, leading to questions as to whether children have been receiving their legal entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum. The two national curriculums have been seen as ideologically driven, the latest incarnation (DfE, 2013) having a strong narrative of traditionalism, promoting firmly held conservative values. The long-held belief that it was not for government to determine pedagogy was overturned by the scripted approach determined by the Labour government of Tony Blair, most clearly evident in the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies. Significant changes in terminology within the sector, consistent with the language of 'market, management and performance' (Ball, 2016, p.1046), have contributed to a culture where attention is deflected away from aspects of social, emotional and moral development, as they do not have measurable performance value. Throughout this time of change, the status of the spoken word within primary education has remained low, despite occasional attempts to raise its profile.

The next chapter provides a context for the research questions. A brief consideration of children's talk pre-school and the differences between the language of home and school is followed by a review of the role of talk in children's classroom learning with a specific focus on dialogic pedagogy which values high levels of pupil participation. Pedagogic techniques are considered, as is the value system which a dialogic approach implies. The chapter concludes with an outline of two thinking skills programmes, with a focus on P4C, and how they align with dialogic pedagogy. The initial research questions are then reconsidered in the light of the literature reviewed.

## Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

### 3.1 Talk pre-school

When children start school they have some facility with spoken language. Evidence suggests that there is a significant discrepancy between the language skills of different children. The Bercow report (Bercow, 2008), as discussed in chapter one, and research over time by Goswami and Bryant (2010), note stark differences in toddlers' exposure to language. Cameron-Faulkner, Lieven and Tomasello (2003) state that the range of utterances which a toddler hears can be anywhere between 5000 and 7000 a day, with a third of these being questions. Wolf (2008) sees clear links between a lack of literacy experience in the home or pre-school and children's achievement in primary school. She argues that children who grow up with very few literacy experiences can have difficulty with concepts if certain words or syntactic structures have not previously been encountered, and that the ability to predict events or infer meanings from stories is also held back (2008). Evidence from a study by Hart and Risley (1995) suggests a significant disparity in the number of words heard by children from different social backgrounds that may support Bernstein's contention of a link between language and social class (1973). Yet, as Sylva *et al.* (2010) point out, it is not necessarily the number of words heard that will make a qualitative difference to cognitive development, it is the quality and frequency of literacy-related activities that matter.

The way parents or teachers interact with children has been shown to influence the development of memory and organisation of experience (Goswami, 2015). For, while young children have been seen to have remarkably good semantic and episodic memories (Bauer, 2015), they do not structure experience in memorable ways unless they have a temporal framework for doing so. Reese, Haden and Fivush (1993) found that an 'elaborative' conversational style, involving amplifying the information recalled by the child, then elaborating it by a series of conversational prompts and recasting it, seemed to result in children with more organised and detailed memories. Longitudinal studies have also shown that it is the experience of verbalising events as they occur that is critical for long-term retention (Fivush and Schwarzmüller, 1998). This practice resonates with Mercer's (2000) five common

techniques for teachers to use to build pupils' new understanding based on past activity, summarised as recapitulation, elicitation, repetition, reformulation and exhortation. They are also similar to the pedagogic practices recommended by Alexander (2017) such as talk that is cumulative, reciprocal and supportive among pupils and between pupil and teacher, approaches that place dialogue at the heart of practice, as discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

### **3.2 Home talk and school talk**

Becoming articulate and developing a facility with literacy can be regarded as a means to individual and collective empowerment or emancipation. The nature of this aspect of the development of language is political; by becoming able to use the tool which can be used to oppress them, people can develop agency and begin to redress a power imbalance. For Paulo Freire, whose ideas became influential particularly in the area of adult and continuing education (Lavender and Tuckett, 2020), developing a community's command of language, initially through teaching them to read, was the first step on this road. His experience taught him that people would learn to read quickly if they were reading words which were of significance to them in their daily struggles. Language became a way for people to critically evaluate their own reality, moving from a belief that 'things are just as they are' to becoming able to attribute reasons and develop an understanding of causality. He termed this awakening as a moving from 'magical' or 'naïve' consciousness to a critical awareness (1974).

Freire's beliefs about language led him to coin the phrase 'dominant syntax' to describe the language of the school (the language of power), which he felt was necessary for children (or illiterate adults) to learn, to empower them to become agents in their own lives and 'articulate their voices in the struggle against injustice' (Freire, 1996). At the same time, he cautioned that teachers should appreciate vernacular language for its beauty and draw on children's life experiences. Central to Freire's approach to education was the relationship between pupil and teacher which should be one of equals; learning was a two way process. He contrasted this with a more traditional approach characterised by unequal power relationships, or what he

termed the 'banking concept' (1970, p.56). Here the teacher possessed the knowledge which she transferred to the pupils. Freire espoused a learning process where 'the cognizable object intermediates the cognitive actors - teacher on the one hand and students on the other' (1970, p.60), akin to describing the thinking occurring between people leading some in the field to coin the term 'interthinking' (Littleton and Mercer, 2013). The process is recursive and a shared reflective experience. A crucial term in Freire's articulation of his thinking was 'dialogue.' His 'problem-posing' method only worked if teacher and pupil were in dialogue. True dialogic education was described by Freire as both liberating and humanising.

In a similar way, Bernstein distinguished between the 'vertical discourse' of school which tends towards analysis, and everyday communication, what he termed 'horizontal discourse', characterised by narrative (2003). He believed that the preponderance of vertical discourse in school differentially disadvantaged and 'regulated the consciousness' of children from poor social backgrounds as it focused on the transmission of curriculum content. The preponderance of teacher question and pupil one-word answers, or what he called a 'lexical pedagogic code' (2003, p.207) gave little time for discussion or development of relationships. For Bernstein the 'primary pedagogic space' was the home. Depending on the language used in the home, and here he intended syntactic structures as much as vocabulary, children could find difficulty in accessing the curriculum because the vocabulary and syntax were unfamiliar. Issues of pacing the curriculum and the nature of power relationships could doubly disadvantage these children. Whether or not the analysis which places social class to the fore is credible, his alternative envisages greater opportunities for discussion, a more participative role for the pupils and a closer relationship between them and their teachers - a 'syntactic pedagogic code' (Bernstein, 2003, p.207).

Halliday (1993) came at child development from a linguistic perspective. He shared a socio-constructivist stance with Vygotsky (2012) but took this one stage further, treating language simultaneously as 'system and resource, code and behaviour' (Wells, 1999, p.6). Halliday posited a three-step model of human semiotic development with a three to five year gap between each of the final two steps:

Protolanguage → generalisation → abstractness → metaphor

**'Grammatical generalisation'** is the key for entering into language and to systematic common sense knowledge. However, it is the next two - **'grammatical abstractness'** and **'grammatical metaphor'** - which are of fundamental importance in education (1993, p.111).

In the first few years of education, a child learns both to read and write. These methods of decoding and encoding meaning are an abstraction, bringing an awareness of the medium of language itself and also to the meanings that it encodes. As Wells points out (1999, p.45), at this stage children not only reconstitute their 'lexicogrammar', but come to reinterpret their experiences according to the semantic structures which are characteristic of these written texts. It was this that Wolf was commenting on when she wrote that children who enter school with impoverished language experiences, will find formal education even more difficult as they will need to adapt to new vocabulary (lexicon) as well as grammar (2008). This is the stage that Halliday identifies as **'grammatical abstractness'**.

The final stage - termed **'grammatical metaphor'** - is compatible with what Vygotsky meant when he discussed a child's growing awareness of, and ability to explain, what he termed 'scientific concepts' (2012, pp.201). These are the systematically related concepts that correspond to the more abstract semantic structures found in written texts. The distinction between 'scientific' and 'spontaneous' concepts corresponds to what we may term 'everyday' and 'abstract' similar to Bernstein's horizontal and vertical discourse (2003). Two examples he cites are the words 'bicycle' for spontaneous and 'exploitation' for scientific. The most significant factor in the grammatical metaphor stage, which has major implications for a child's ability to manipulate language, is the use of nouns instead of verbs to objectify experience. Compare, for example, 'Whenever an engine breaks down, trains are cancelled' with 'in times of engine failure, there are cancellations'. Halliday states that 'grammatical metaphor brings about a reconstrual of experience, in which reality comes to consist of things rather than doing or happening' (1993, p.111). This move from verbs to nouns, which Fromm called 'nominalisation' (2016, p.19), primarily evolved as the language of Technology or Science. It now permeates almost every register of English. Halliday gives the example taken from a label on an item of clothing to make the point: 'prolonged exposure will result in rapid deterioration of the item' (1993, p.112). The ability to understand this 'nominalised'

language, then, becomes significant for children to access the curriculum, as it is used by teachers in school as part of the vertical discourse.

### 3.3 Talk in the classroom

#### Teacher-led talk

Research dating back to 1960s has demonstrated the extent to which classroom talk is dominated by the teacher. Flanders (1961) examined patterns of talk in US classrooms over a six-year period and came up with the famous 'two thirds rule': two thirds of classroom time involves talk; two thirds of that talk is teacher talk and two thirds of teacher talk is devoted to explaining or directing. A number of studies over time have yielded similar results. Edwards and Furlong's (1978) study of secondary classrooms demonstrated how talk patterns, dominated by telling, reflected the teacher's authority. Galton, Simon and Croll (1980) conducted research over a five-year period in English primary classrooms and noted very little attention was devoted to each pupil. This research was replicated twenty years later in the wake of the National Curriculum. It found that there was more whole class talk occurring, but little else had changed (Galton *et al.*, 1999).

Mroz, Smith and Hardman (2000) and Burns and Myhill (2004) also confirmed that these pedagogical habits persisted, despite the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, with some estimating the percentage of teacher talk time being as high as 74% (Smith *et al.*, 2004). More recent studies also confirm the continuation of a pattern of teachers dominating classroom interactions (Vaish, 2008; Skidmore and Murakami, 2012; Wangru, 2016). Hattie (2012) argues that teachers need to become better listeners to establish exactly what their pupils know. His research does show advantages for a high-profile teacher role, but as what he describes as an 'activator', guiding and engaging pupils in their own learning (Knight, 2020).

It would seem, therefore, that it is not the interaction between pupil and teacher that is important, but the quality of it. As Alexander states (2017), it is not the organisational aspect of the talk that matters, but rather the discourse and values associated with talk. There are also clear implications relating to power,

communicative rights and ownership of learning in a classroom where the teacher's voice is the 'authoritative text' that frames social interaction (Maybin, 2006).

### **Initiation, response, feedback**

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) developed a framework for analysing classroom interaction in terms of three moves: initiation by the teacher, response by the pupil and feedback from the teacher (IRF). This approach, sometimes termed 'triadic dialogue' (Lemke, 1990) or IRE (initiation, response, evaluation), has been evidenced by several different studies and has implications for learning. Nystrand *et al.* (1997), for example, observed teachers either lecturing or asking nearly all the questions, few of which involved any follow-up to student responses. Galton (1989) comments on the rarity of autonomous pupil-led discussion and problem solving, Alexander (2017) notes a low level of cognitive challenge in many classroom questions. Similarly, Myhill (2006) reports that 60 per cent of questions were factual rather than process-oriented and children's own questions were seldom heard. Smith *et al.* (2004) suggest that 70% of children's responses were three words or fewer and Burns and Myhill (2004) note many examples of the 'third move' (teacher feedback) missing, resulting in a sequences of initiation-response-initiation-response. There are also some, but many fewer, studies which demonstrate more productive use of dialogue with examples of elaboration, reasoning and querying - for example Vrikki *et al.* (2019). One study, Topping and Trickey (2014), reports on a large-scale field trial of the *Philosophy for Children* programme in schools in Clackmannanshire. Observations in this study enabled tallying of verbal behaviours for both quantity and quality. Findings revealed statistically significant gains in teacher use of open-ended questions, proportion of pupil talk and use of reasoned responses.

As Knight (2020) points out, many different accounts of teacher-led talk reveal that a tightly controlled approach to classroom interaction is often motivated by the teacher's desire to seek agreement on a 'right answer'. The need to meet the learning objective, focussing on a pre-determined outcome, may meet the teacher's purposes, but not necessarily the pupils' learning needs. For O'Connor *et al.* (2017) the need for the teacher to balance a range of requirements such as clarity,

coherence, adequate representation of content, time and participation leads to a trade-off resulting in the same effect.

Howe and Abedin's systematic review of 225 studies of classroom dialogue across four decades (2013) revealed the IRF structure is not confined to communities where English is the primary language. This is confirmed by Alexander's (2001) five nations study and Hardman's (2008) reports on Nigerian and Kenyan classrooms. Nor is IRF monolithic in structure. In fact, they document considerable variation, noting the particularly common usage where IRF is extended or co-exists with structures where competing responses are considered before feedback is given (Bleicher, Tobin and McRobbie, 2003; Dombey, 2003; Olitsky, 2007 & Skidmore and Murakami, 2010). This theme is taken up by Wells (1999) who, as discussed below, proposes a variation on the traditional structure during the teacher response phase.

### **Differential behaviours in participation**

Differential behaviours based on gender and ethnicity are also reviewed by Howe and Abedin (2013). With regard to gender, they note that on average in studies pre- and post- 1997, boys are more likely than girls both to respond to teachers' initiations (Howe, 1997; Jule, 2002), and to receive feedback from teachers, especially negative feedback (Younger, Warrington and Williams, 1999; Duffy, Warren and Walsh, 2001; and Rampton, 2006). The gender disparity results from a mixture of self-selection - boys calling out without being invited or selected by the teacher - and teacher selection - boys being chosen more often from students with their hands up (Howe, 1997). Burns and Myhill (2004) note that, in terms of absolute frequency, girls put their hands up more often than boys, but that there are no differences in answering after invitation - once again showing a disparity in the teachers' treatment of boys and girls. These findings are corroborated by Swann (1992, 2002) who shows that boys tend to monopolize teachers' attention, but that teachers choose boys more frequently than girls. However, on closer analysis Swann identifies different behaviours in different contexts. In a relatively informal 'pendulum' discussion, for example, boys are more inclined to chip in more. But when teachers are more in control of the discussion and 'mining' for answers, neither gender shows a greater likelihood of contribution. On average, boys are more likely to be selected by the teacher, but this is because they put their hands up more quickly and

decisively. Swann also notes that many studies of classroom talk have relied on audio-only recordings and there are many non-verbal strategies at play which may also have a decisive influence on behaviours. Howe (1997) reveals a second strand in her research where girls are seen to actively contribute to male dominance (Lee, 1993; Siann *et al.*, 1990). In these and other studies (Conwell, Griffin and Algozzine, 1993; Lee, 1993), girls more actively ask for help than boys. Both boys and girls are more likely to ask boys for help. Yet, paradoxically, as boys more regularly ignore requests for help, girls end up being the ones that give more assistance.

When it comes to ethnicity, there is conflicting evidence in terms of both child contribution and teacher predispositions to engage with children. Some studies reflect minority ethnic students participating less frequently in class, others see no substantial difference. As is to be expected, results vary according to which ethnic group is studied. Observing in English classrooms, Tennant, for example (2004), notes that African-Caribbean and white students both engage in more interaction with the teacher than Asian heritage students. This, to some extent, corroborates Biggs and Edwards (1991) who found there was no significant difference in contributions between what they classed as black or white children (the largest significant ethnic minority group were of Mirpuri Pakistani origin). However, they found that teachers had significantly fewer extended conversations (i.e. lasting more than thirty seconds) with black children than with white. This study also found that teachers tended to interact less with girls than boys.

Howe and Abedin's review (2013) also reveals a strong positive correlation between higher attainment and classroom participation (whether at their own initiation or in response to teachers). As a consequence of a greater degree of participation, higher attainers are also seen to receive more feedback from teachers (Good, Cooper and Blakely, 1980; Buriel, 1983). It is, therefore, no surprise to learn that many studies identify high-attaining boys as the most prominent group in many classrooms. However, there is much to be missed in this analysis, as although feedback from teachers tends to be skewed in favour of boys, this is especially pronounced for negative feedback. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, those in receipt of most positive feedback are high attainers and those who more often receive negative are low attainers.

### 3.4. Dialogue and Pedagogy

Many studies have emphasised the value of dialogue in classroom interactions between pupil and teacher, and pupils and their peers. Writers such as Nystrand *et al.* (1997), Alexander (2017), Skidmore (2006), and Lyle (2008), draw on the works of the Russian critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) to consider the educative potential of teacher-student and student-student interactions that enable the learner to play an active part in shaping the agenda of classroom discourse. These studies differentiate between monologic and dialogic discourse. Monologic is characterised by teacher control of classroom talk with the purpose of transmitting knowledge, often characterised by the IRF (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). Dialogic discourse, by contrast, is based on a different kind of communication between pupil and teacher, where students are asked to think, not merely remember, and collaborative meaning making is encouraged and can entail a repositioning of the teacher pupil speech-role balance (Habermas, 1984).

Different conceptualisations of the dialogic approach to the nature of classroom discourse use slightly differing terminology. 'Dialogic Instruction' for example is characterised by teacher uptake of student ideas and opportunities for students to shape the topic (Nystrand *et al.*, 1997). 'Dialogic Inquiry' is focussed around peer and group work in the zone of proximal development (Wells, 1999). In 'Dialogical Pedagogy', students are encouraged to retell stories in their own words using paraphrasing, speculation and counter-fictional utterances (Skidmore, 2000). Specific definitions of what is included in the term 'dialogue' by Howe and Abedin (2013) include definitions by Scott, Mortimer and Aguiar (2006) and Scott and Ametller (2007) such as 'authoritative interaction' (discussion amongst several individuals about a single, received idea) and 'dialogic interaction' (discussion amongst several individuals about contrasting ideas). Yet other approaches share very similar themes and techniques of classroom interaction but do not use the words dialogue or dialogic in a description of their practice. Notable amongst these is Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick's work on what they call *Accountable Talk* (2007) which emphasises the careful orchestration of talk and discussion practices involving reasoning in what is termed 'deliberative discourse'. This approach shares key features with P4C (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980), particularly in the focus on

oral reasoning and the development of a shared sense of community in enquiry, involving a commitment to the values of civic justice and democracy.

### **Talking with peers**

'Exploratory talk' was a term invented by Barnes and Todd (1977) to describe an approach identified by Piaget (1932), the requirement being that competing positions are expressed and justified in response to disagreement, and resolution of differences is achieved through evaluation of justifications. Although he believed very young children could not see another's point of view, Piaget's ideas about children's peer groups revolved around the belief that cognitive growth depended on existing beliefs being co-ordinated with contrasting perspectives (1932, 1985). Children were more likely to engage conversationally with peers, coordinate the views expressed by peers with their own views and, when different opinions were detected, comment accordingly. This comparison with alternative views was likely to promote cognitive growth. It was less likely to occur between an adult and child because of contrasting power relations. Because adults are more powerful, children assimilate their ideas unthinkingly and see no reason to engage with them conversationally. Although he proposed this theory, most empirical testing of Piaget's ideas did not occur until the last quarter of the twentieth century, after his death. There is now a significant body of evidence supporting the value to children's progress in learning of exchange of opinion in peer group interactions. Most has been at group level. The group studies range across different curriculum areas - e.g. literacy and the arts (Miell and Littleton, 2004), mathematics (Damon and Phelps, 1988), and exploratory talk (Barnes and Todd, 1977). One of the most popular contexts has been Science. There have also been two at whole class level, both using *Philosophy for Children* (Trickey and Topping, 2004; Gorard, Siddiqui and See, 2015). There is pupil progress in all these studies, but it is particularly strong where differences in opinions are expressed in group work without adult or teacher involvement, supporting Piaget's initial hypothesis.

Howe (2010) used the term 'performance mode' to describe a situation where peer group experiences in whole class settings involve one child 'performing' by answering a teacher question, whilst the rest of the class is the audience. This is linked closely with the IRF approach, what Cazden termed 'traditional' (2001).

Performance mode is contrasted with what she describes as 'cooperative mode' which is far less common; here children experience their peers differently.

Symptomatic of cooperative mode are relatively symmetric roles, such as debates where children experience peers as respondents to their own ideas and sources of alternative ideas to which they can respond. Alternatively, cooperation can result in asymmetry where one child requires assistance and the other child gives it (or does not). The outcomes here are asymmetric, in either case. But, where help is given and received, children experience their peers as sources of alternative ideas.

### **Creating a learning community**

Wells' (1999) book 'Dialogic Inquiry' presents a comparative analysis of the systemic functional linguistics of Halliday with Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD. Like Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) and Watkins (2005), Wells sees the potential in classrooms for learning communities where knowledge is co-constructed between pupils and teachers. Through classroom discussion, often in small groups, rather than whole classes, ideas can be clarified through a process Bereiter (1997) calls 'progressive discourse', where the discussion includes agreeing, disagreeing, qualifying, adding etc., thus enabling a cumulative improvement in understanding of the topic in question. This is similar to elements of Alexander's 'scaffolded dialogue' (2017), and Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif's *Thinking Together* programme (2000) and the approach promoted by critical thinking programmes such as *Accountable Talk* (Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick, 2007) and P4C.

Wells' work is far-reaching and radical. In his approach to schooling as, 'semiotic apprenticeship' (1999 p.137), he proposes the model of an enquiry-oriented curriculum where a class theme is selected, such as *Energy* within the science curriculum. Pupils have considerable freedom to choose their own specific topics and methods of inquiry in negotiation with the teacher. The relationship between teacher and students is dialogic, but is not a dialogue between equals. The teacher still plans the learning activities and has responsibility for selecting themes but, once student investigation is under way, the teacher adopts a more responsive and consultative role in which intervention is contingent upon student progress. In a reconsideration of the IRF sequence, he shows that the teacher follow-up 'move' (feedback) can be used to clarify, exemplify, expand, explain or justify a student's

response rather than as an evaluative judgemental device. This important point reflects Wells' view that a teacher has discretion over the learning environment he/she creates. The choice between modes of interaction can maximize or minimise the social distance between teacher and pupil.

Skidmore (2006) regards Wells' model of an enquiry-oriented curriculum as a welcome break from the objectives model currently so prevalent worldwide and which has dominated Government policy making in England since the 1988 Education Reform Act. His plea, and to some extent his critique of Wells, is for a pedagogy where knowledge is expressible not only in terms of valid propositions. He is firmly of the opinion that it is a mistake to try and separate the academic and social outcomes of schooling and that conceptual content and emotional 'colouring' cannot be dissociated (2006, p.512). This belief is echoed in research published by Siddiqui, Gorrard and See (2017, 2019) in their evaluation of P4C programmes, where the quality of classroom relationships and the powerful effects of encountering alternative views are considered to develop pupils' non-cognitive, as well as cognitive skills.

### **Language forms and a 'dialogic stance'**

Discussion in the previous sections has demonstrated dialogic teaching as a broad term that encompasses a variety of similar approaches. Maybin (2006) draws a distinction between the word 'dialogue' as a synonym for conversation and 'dialogic' which is described as a 'constant ongoing process of interactive and recursive meaning-making amongst children' (2006, p.24). This meaning-making thrives in conditions where there are different perspectives, as outlined above, where cognitive growth depends on existing beliefs being co-ordinated with contrasting perspectives (Piaget, 1932, 1985; Barnes and Todd, 1977) - what Wegerif (2011) calls the 'dialogic gap'. Important techniques of a dialogic approach are seen to be teachers' use of authentic questions; uptake, where a teacher incorporates student responses into subsequent questions; and the extent to which the teacher allows a student response to modify the topic of discourse.

Much is made of the use of questioning in dialogic teaching and, although it is not within the scope of this study to fully explore this aspect of teaching, the following observations are worthy of consideration. Mercer argues in a passage entitled 'the

trouble with questions' (1995, p.27), that it is not the verbal techniques 'per se' that a teacher uses that are critical in their classroom talk. People do not reliably use the same grammatical forms of speech to pursue the same purposes. Likewise Barnes and Todd believe 'Forms are shaped to the purpose of the speaker and not vice versa' (1977, p.116). It is this belief also that led Boyd and Markarian to hypothesise what they describe as a 'dialogic stance'. This disposition is not dependent on the use of any particular language form (2011, p.516). Indeed, they believe that the dialogic stance permeates the 'illocutionary force' of the talk and the discourse space (Linell and Markova, 1993). In other words, it is not just how we say it, but how we are disposed to receive it. Their theory is expounded by reference to a series of classroom observations of a teacher they call Michael in an American elementary class of nine year old (fourth grade) pupils, who actually uses closed questions throughout his classroom discourse with his pupils in discussion of a piece of literature. Michael is convincingly shown to mobilise their everyday knowledge by first listening carefully to their contributions, and then anchoring his questions and comments in these contributions. Using talk in this way he is able to negotiate school knowledge and connect it to what students already know in a meaningful exemplification of Bernstein's horizontal and vertical discourse (2003).

A 'dialogic stance' is reliant on a teacher's facility for listening to students' real voices - the everyday discourses and experiences the students bring to class - in order to bring this together with school learning (Boyd and Markarian, 2011, p.519). A further epistemological distinction is made between teachers who adopt monologic or dialogic stances. A teacher who adopts a monologic stance takes as 'a priori' that if a student listens carefully enough to dissemination of school knowledge, he or she should be able to understand, retain and apply what the teacher has transmitted. A dialogic teacher, by contrast, takes the onus of careful listening upon herself. She does not assume that a student's lack of comprehension is evidence of not listening, more of not being able to make the link between everyday knowledge and the new school knowledge the teacher is asking them to learn. Rather than telling the student to listen harder, the dialogic teacher will try to listen better, to seek out a better way to make links between the student's current knowledge and what she is expecting her to learn (Boyd and Markarian, 2011).

## **A dialogic view of education**

It would seem, then, that dialogic teaching represents a broad set of concepts and values, rather than merely a repertoire of talk moves. It entails a commitment to democratic participation where the interaction between pupils and teacher relies on careful listening by all participants; questioning which is not limited to the IRF exchange; and students at times determining the direction the learning takes. The teacher may also provide useful links between pupils' life experiences and school knowledge - a constant theme in the writings of John Dewey. The 'dialogic stance' can also be associated with a classroom environment which encourages exploratory talk (Barnes and Todd, 1977) involving discussion and debate between pupils with contrasting ideas with or without the presence of the teacher. Use of the word dialogic is traced by some to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin whose work 'The Dialogic Imagination' (1981) is focussed on the nature of language and knowledge, whereas others, such as Boyd and Markarian (2011), associate it with Freire (1970, 1974), and a political stance leading to emancipation.

A key feature of dialogic teaching common to all of the literature discussed above is the importance of the relationship between teacher and pupils, and amongst pupils. The dialogic relationship is characterised by mutual respect, and teacher willingness to respond to pupil voice, which goes some way towards redressing the inevitable speech-role imbalance inherent in school education. The relationship which develops, requires an atmosphere of trust and reciprocity, a genuine sense of community. Many of the techniques which apply in dialogic teaching are shared with approaches to the teaching of thinking skills considered below.

### **3.5 Talk in the development of thinking skills**

This section of the literature review considers approaches to learning which emphasise the value of talk in reasoning. The principal focus is upon *Philosophy for Children* (P4C), but there is a short explanation of another programme, *Accountable Talk* by way of comparison.

## Accountable Talk

Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick (2007) position their work on *Accountable Talk* firmly in the tradition of theories of democratic education. They cite Dewey's definition of democracy that places reasoned discussion at its very heart (1916) and Habermas's notions of 'deliberative democracy' and the 'public sphere' (1990), defining this as one tradition. But they place their work in a parallel line of investigation in education which they believe has developed independently but shares commitments to equality of access to knowledge and to social justice. The focus is on developing learning with understanding of complex academic content. It draws upon constructivist and socio-cultural principles that emphasise the importance of social practices, in particular the careful orchestration of talk and tasks in academic learning.

*Accountable Talk* encompasses three broad dimensions: accountability to the learning community, in which participants listen to and build their contributions in response to those of others; accountability to accepted standards of reasoning, talk that emphasises logical connections and the drawing of reasonable conclusions; and thirdly, accountability to knowledge, talk that is based explicitly on facts, written texts or other public information. Whilst these three facets of talk can be regarded as analytically separable in practice, Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick believe that they are interwoven and interdependent (2007). They must co-occur if the discourse is to promote academic learning.

*Accountable Talk* engages pupils in deliberative discourse, sense-making and reasoning in subjects with established bodies of knowledge like mathematics or science in contrast to P4C which does not situate enquiries in a discipline-specific context. The focus of the programme is that good reasoning, hence good discourse, relies upon good knowledge: they both best develop in tandem, and neither precedes the other. To orchestrate this interdependent development and teach good knowledge alongside discursive methods is described as 'perhaps pedagogy's greatest challenge' (2007, p.291).

Another insight offered by the authors is closing the gap between what they describe as the 'deliberative discourse idealised and realised' (2007, p.295). For them, what is most striking and challenging is that the *Accountable Talk* discourse norms are what

they describe as ‘differentially available to students in their homes and communities’ (p. 293). Children from homes with high levels of western education come to school well prepared to use these forms of talk, sometimes with great facility and eloquence. But others find them to be unfamiliar and even in conflict with home or community norms. Some of these students can accommodate and assimilate these forms of discourse, beginning to use them haltingly at first, but gradually becoming more confident, but others resist. Some students dominate; some are silent. Some, from more advantaged backgrounds, do not regard deliberative discourse as a moral obligation despite the teacher setting up the norms as reciprocal social obligations. The parallels with broader civic society are clear. Deliberative practices are an interactional accomplishment; shared norms underpinning them have to be established, either negotiated or mandated. But there are important differences between the classroom and wider civic society, not least in the absence in the latter of an analogue to the teacher, to establish the norms and negotiate any ensuing conflicts. The aim of the programme is that students, who have been socialised in these discourse norms in an academic setting, will internalise them and carry them into the civic sphere.

### **Philosophy for Children**

If *Accountable Talk* represents one tradition of democratic education, with its distinctively academic flavour, *Philosophy for Children* could be seen as representing the other, with a focus that is often moral or ethical. P4C, unlike its counterpart, does draw on Dewey’s definition of democracy that places reasoned discussion at its heart (1916). It also has parallels with Habermas’s notions of ‘deliberative democracy’ and the ‘public sphere’ as an idealised discursive space where debate and dialogue are free and uncoerced (1990). P4C promotes the core ideas of critical thinking, nurturing children’s curiosity, supporting them in using the language of reasoning and argumentation. Lessons are centred on the idea of an ‘enquiry’ where everyone’s opinion is valued.

Enquiries enable children to consider themes such as justice, truth, cause, belief, knowledge and tolerance, although they are seldom voiced in such abstract terms. Questions observed in the Education Endowment Foundation Study (EEF), for example (Gorard, Siddiqui and See, 2015), were based on a story about a bird that

could not fit in to other families of birds. They ranged from 'Why do we need to have a family?' to 'If you look different does it also mean you are different on the inside?' Unlike most classroom discussions where teachers ask the questions (Cazden, 2001), in P4C the children themselves decide on what theme to explore by using an inclusive voting system after pairs of children have discussed their initial response to the stimulus and jotted down a question they would like to discuss. The children are thus seen as 'active epistemic agents and participants in their own knowledge' (Skidmore, 2006 p. 505). They participate in the discussion, building on each other's contributions, clarifying them, questioning them and stating their own opinions. Just as the children choose the question they wish to discuss, a speaker in P4C chooses the next contributor in discussion; it is not the teacher's choice. This, like the voting system and the discussion itself, is revolutionary in pedagogy and considerably redresses the asymmetry of speech-role in class during these sessions. Children face each other in a circle, during an enquiry, appropriate for a discussion situation.

The challenge for the teacher is significant. Planning for enquiries holds none of the certainties of knowledge content to be 'delivered', timings to be adhered to and pupil groupings decided by the teacher, so common in 'traditional' pedagogy (Cazden, 2001). Sensitivity in facilitation of the enquiry is also required. She must not intervene too much but needs to be able to guide the discussion, asking pupils to imagine alternatives, provide evidence for their assertions and qualify their statements. Teacher intervention requires skills in encouraging higher order contributions such as exposition, explanation, justification, speculation and hypothesising (Lyle, 2008). Students are expected to show appreciation for others' points of view, even when they differ. Techniques like using the previous speaker's name and giving eye contact are emphasised. This aspect is similar to accountability to the community in *Accountable Talk* and known as 'appreciative enquiry'.

Throughout an enquiry, teachers are expected to promote a model stance of 'fallibilism', in contrast to the prevalent transmissionist pedagogy where the teacher is often seen as 'the fount of all knowledge'.

The community of enquiry in P4C is based on four 'C's: pupils are expected to be caring, collaborative, critical and creative. Unlike a number of other thinking skills programmes, P4C promotes children's emotional development as well as cultivating rational thinking. P4C's proponents claim that the creative use of the imagination

requires humans to draw on their emotional understanding, whereas the exercise of critical reflection involves the use of rational understanding (Lyle, 2008). The P4C programme seeks to unite both approaches to improve children's understanding of the world in a way that seems to go some way towards answering Skidmore's plea (2006, p.512) for a pedagogy that unites the intellect with affect. The programme does not lend itself to any specific body of curricular knowledge although, as has been mentioned, links to Ethics and Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) are evident.

Many of the skills developed through P4C have echoes of aspects of dialogic pedagogy discussed previously in this study such as good listening and the ability to make links to prior learning (Mercer, 2000), or approaches which are collective, reciprocal, supportive, and cumulative (Alexander, 2017). Some authors have drawn links between shared autonomous reasoning - a feature of Habermasian discourse - and the community of philosophical enquiry proposed by P4C (Fletcher, 2016). The idea of 'deliberative democracy' as outlined in Habermas's 'discourse ethics' relies on a reasoned and inclusive public deliberation designed to lead to consensual decisions. Another similarity between P4C and Habermasian theory is the epistemological stance of fallibilism, as noted above. The teacher in P4C is a fallible co-enquirer with the children, not an infallible teller (Young, 1992).

P4C has been the subject of a number of moderate-sized and longitudinal research studies (Trickey and Topping, 2004, 2007; Topping and Trickey, 2007a, 2007b, 2014; Colom *et al.*, 2014; Gorrard, Siddiqui and See, 2015). These studies have been both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Most quantitative studies have revealed positive impacts on attainment or cognitive learning gains (e.g. Topping and Trickey, 2004; Gorrard, Siddiqui and See, 2015). Some have indicated that there have been more extended utterances by pupils and a slight redress in the balance of teacher talk to pupil talk in lessons (e.g. Topping and Trickey, 2004). The large-scale EEF study (Gorrard, Siddiqui and See, 2015) found that P4C had the biggest positive impact on Key Stage 2 pupils from disadvantaged or low-income backgrounds. A recent evaluation of this study by a team from NFER (Lord *et al.*, 2021) throws into question these claims, suggesting that there is no evidence for them. However, it did report positively on teacher views of the programme. It noted that pupils had improved their respect for others' views and opinions, with 93%

feeling that pupils had improved their ability to express their views clearly. Teachers also found the programme 'particularly beneficial for EAL pupils, those who lacked confidence, or SEN pupils' (2021, p.5).

Qualitative studies have confirmed these views, seeing a number of non-cognitive benefits such as improved confidence in questioning and reasoning and improvements in respect, tolerance, co-operation, and teamwork. Teachers have also reported that the programme has helped in overcoming the challenge of disruption in the classroom (Siddiqui, Gorard and See, 2019). Largely unreported were the results of the pupil questionnaire in the original Clackmannanshire study published only in a less well-known journal which is no longer in circulation (Trickey and Topping, 2007). This research was rich in data suggesting pupils' self-reported gains in areas as widespread as self-confidence, concentration, listening skills, and transferability of skills to other curriculum areas. The authors of the EEF study point to widespread doubts about the nature and value of some of the reported outcomes of their study, such as how we define 'resilience' or 'grit', whether autonomy is necessarily a good thing, and the range of mental and personal constructs from self-esteem to aspiration. But, they also adduce studies that attest to the importance of the wider outcomes of schooling (Siddiqui, Gorard and See, 2017). Pupils who struggle to communicate are more liable to risk of social isolation, rejection and bullying, for example (Knox and Conti-Ramsden, 2003; Hartshorne, 2006).

Longitudinal studies have shown that children with social, emotional and behavioural problems in primary school are both less likely to achieve good results in later schooling (Pataly *et al.*, 2016), but also more likely to experience poor health, drug addiction, depression and other mental health problems (Carneiro, Crawford and Goodman, 2007). Children with good social skills, on the other hand, are more engaged in school and have positive friendship clusters (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012). These qualities are also seen to be correlated with later life outcomes such as employment status, hourly wage and well-being in adult life (Olsson *et al.*, 2013).

P4C has received criticisms for its perceived lack of clarity in the measurement of objectives (Slade, 1992), for its adaptability for achieving aims that can go against the fundamentals of free thought and enquiry, and for not being a proper teaching subject (Kitchener, 1990; Hayes, 2014, 2015). However, Siddiqui, Gorard, and See (2017) believe schools to be places where children can learn behaviour, skills and

attitudes that have lifelong relevance in addition to the formal curriculum of subjects. The study suggests the importance and relevance of the wider non-cognitive outcomes of schooling such as the development of self-confidence, trust, critical thinking and civic-mindedness. Acknowledging the relative paucity of research evidence on whether and how such non-cognitive outcomes can be improved, they feel that their study, like several others before, shows that P4C has some promise for improvement of non-cognitive skills and recommend that the programme be incorporated into the National Curriculum, using pupil premium funding to implement this (2017, p.8).

Whilst a number of studies consider the cognitive and non-cognitive benefits of P4C to children, there has been little research on the effects on teachers or teacher pedagogy of implementing the programme. Some have looked at teacher training (Marie-France, 1988; Popen, 1996 and Burgh and O'Brien, 2002), some on curriculum development (e.g. Cam, 2006), but the only notable papers on how P4C affects teachers are Splitter (2002a and 2002b) and Yeazall, (1979). In an attempt to redress the balance, Baker and Fisher (2016) conducted a small-scale study in a large primary academy in England. Findings from this study suggest that the programme can affect teacher pedagogy and views of education in profound ways. Teachers talk of having to learn how to feel comfortable in their own classrooms again, the difficulty in allowing children to 'just talk' and not having 'correct answers' (2016, p.31). Many found themselves re-examining their own approach to teaching, particularly as regards the knowledge/skills debate, leading to a reconsidered epistemology. Another positive conclusion of this study was that many teachers felt able to test out their ideas with colleagues in a robust and non-confrontational way at odds with a predominantly judgemental educational culture, as children's outcomes were not measured and their success or otherwise attributed to the quality of their teacher's performance (Baker and Fisher, 2016).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This review has considered the importance of talk in classroom learning. A consideration of dialogic teaching has revealed how particular approaches involving elaboration, recapitulation, questioning and discussion in classrooms, such as those recommended by Wells (1999), Mercer (2000), and Alexander (2017) and can build

understanding. In these situations, pupils and teacher are involved in the co-construction of knowledge, the teacher being an enabler and facilitator as well as an instructor. It has also become clear that a dialogic approach requires greater equality in relationships between pupils and between pupil and teacher. A dialogic teacher will be a good listener who seeks to enable the child's voice to be heard, and digs below superficial understanding of what the child says, to what she truly intends. She will also show her fallibility, and not promote an authoritative voice as the fount of all knowledge (Maybin, 2006). The opportunity for children to compare views and opinions is also shown to promote cognitive growth where existing beliefs are coordinated with contrasting perspectives (Piaget, 1932, 1985).

The use of particular techniques, such as open questions or a cumulative recognition of previous learning, can help bridge the gap between Vygotsky's definitions of 'scientific' and 'spontaneous' concepts in children's learning. But, it is not the language forms 'per se' that the teacher uses, that make the difference. Rather, it is a teacher disposition - what Boyd and Markarian (2011) term 'dialogic stance'. Building a bridge between pupils' experiential knowledge and the 'vertical discourse' of the school (Bernstein, 2003), an approach which involves teachers mediating the language which the children use, is seen to be of importance. Thinking skills programmes such as *Accountable Talk* and P4C share key features of the dialogic approach, having a strong commitment to the idea of democratic pedagogy. Pupils develop the language of debate and discussion as well as 'moves' which involve active listening to peers, taking their views into account, and building on each other's contributions, designed to show respect. The practice of these skills presupposes on the part of the teacher (and school) a commitment to a sense of community and the pursuit of social justice in preparing students to be able to engage actively and constructively in society. These attributes of an educated person have resonance with Dewey's view of Democracy (1916), Freire's 'Education for Critical Consciousness' (1974) and Habermas's 'Discourse Ethics' (1990).

### 3.7 Research Questions revisited

In the light of my review of the literature, it became clear that my initial research questions, derived from the pilot study, needed reviewing. I felt that the focus needed to be on talk and how it is used in the classroom in the research venue. It is the main theme of the study, and as such merits a question of its own. To reflect this, I created a new first research question (see below). Another key theme missing from my initial research questions, which emerged as a significant area in the literature, was relationships - both those between teacher and pupil(s) and amongst pupils themselves. I have therefore included it as one aspect of a second question which focuses on teacher pedagogy, relationships and child agency. The third question has remained as it was.

The final research questions are listed below.

#### Revised questions:

- 1) How is talk used in the classroom in the context of a thinking skills approach to learning?
- 2) What are the effects of this approach on teacher pedagogy; classroom relationships between pupils and between pupil(s) and teacher; and child agency?
- 3) What are the implications of these findings for the professional development of teachers?

## Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter provides a discussion of my research positioning, how this framed the enquiry and the methodological approach I used, including the methods of data collection. It ends with a consideration of the approach used to analyse the data.

### 4.1 Research paradigms

The word paradigm is often used in research to refer to a worldview. Lincoln and Guba define it as 'a distillation of what we think about the world but cannot prove' (1985, p.15). Different paradigms are reflected in the respective vocabularies adopted and the way key ideas such as reality and objectivity are defined and conceptualised. The implications of these approaches to ontology, the branch of metaphysics which concerns itself with what exists (Blackburn, 2008), are clear for epistemology, or what can be properly regarded as knowledge. A different stance is taken depending on your worldview, but also on what is being researched. Research conducted in a science subject might use a tool to make measurements of the physical world (such as the movements of particles in the atmosphere). Yet interpretations of social reality, such as is found in the classroom in the current study, often rely more on interpretation through the 'lens' of the observer and will consequently be more likely to adopt what is known as an interpretivist stance (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

Both Dewey (1916) and Ryle (1954) eschew a rigid adherence to any one particular paradigm in favour of a 'common sense' approach to research. This appeal to 'common sense' finds some resonance in Elliott (2006), who is critical of an objective approach found in 'research on education' which, he believes, misses some of the essential complexity of the lived experience and social reality of the world of education and teaching. He suggests that teachers need theories of a different kind to allow them to discern some of the 'practically relevant features of the complex situations they have to handle on a day-to-day basis' (2006, p.175). As Bryman points out (2008, p.16), the fundamental difference between the subject matter of the natural sciences and social sciences is that social reality has a meaning for human beings. People act on the basis of the meanings they attribute to their acts and the acts of others. It is, therefore, the job of the social scientist to gain access to

people's 'common-sense thinking', and to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view. This acknowledgment of the inter-relationships of things and people in social realities leads van Manen (1995) to attempt to outline what he describes as an 'epistemology of tact', acknowledging the practical, experiential and physical aspects of 'knowing' as important in the practice of teaching. It differs from the usual understanding of a philosophical approach being a theory and attempts to define something more fluid and responsive where the 'substance of pedagogical action' takes place at a level of 'temporal immediacy' (1995, p.11).

## **4.2 Research positioning**

My own research positioning stems from my understanding that human agency is made possible by social structures (Bourdieu, 1990), and that the individuals that inhabit these social structures are capable of consciously reflecting upon and changing the actions that produce them. However, dialogue between different accounts of reality is necessary to create a more coherent social meaning and understanding that different observers can agree upon. Humans imbue events and interactions with their own meanings and understandings viewed from their own terms of reference (Hollis and Lukeš, 1982). But we are also situated culturally and historically, so we contrive to understand our world in terms of social forces and underpin such understandings with theory (whether it be Marxist, Freudian or Keynesian, for example). As I stated in the first chapter of this thesis, in many different manifestations of my personal and professional life I have seen that interactions through dialogue help construct a meaningful shared experience. To communicate with other people, I have needed to try to understand the interpretations they give of what they are doing. This has involved careful listening as they may use different vocabulary or phrase their interpretations of events differently to me. But there have also been many points of shared understanding, whether at a cultural or linguistic level. This belief in the power of listening and dialogue - the power of language to shape our thinking and view of the world - has led me to seek to research the use of dialogue in teaching, as it places value in the process of sharing understanding through the use of language.

Shared understandings and language use can be transformational. Knowledge can serve different interests and one of its key purposes can be emancipatory (Habermas, 1972). This view of education as democratic, opening horizons and enabling mobility (Apple, 2004), is a core value in my educational philosophy. It has been a guiding principle of my working life, whether as a primary school teacher or teacher educator and has determined in large part my choice of where I have worked.

When considering my positioning, this approach to constructing mutual understanding through dialogue leads me to the view that what I see and understand of the world is not *given* by what Dewey (1938) calls objective conditions; it is *taken* by me. What I take is a transaction. It is the direct relation of the world out there, which I can never directly know, and what I bring to it. The result is the sense I make - the experience I have (Eisner, 1993). This leads me to conclude that I am at least in part an interpretivist. As a best fit, I probably subscribe to a 'critical realist' ontology and epistemology (Bhaskar, 1987), believing in a reality with 'depth'. As my reference to Dewey reveals, I know, as a teacher, that my interpretations of meaning are contingent on circumstances; I have a pragmatic understanding.

This stance has led me to construct a research design that is qualitative in nature, using observations and interviews which allow me to interpret the data, but also to engage with the understandings that others bring. In choosing a case study approach, involving thick description (Geertz, 1973), I have presented details of the social relationships that pertain in the context of the case, and established the significance of the experiences described for the community researched. I have tried to build up description where the voices, feelings and meanings of the interacting individuals are heard (Denzin, 1989, p.83). This approach reflects my belief in the value of listening and understanding the interpretations others give of what they are doing.

## 4.3 Methodology

Whereas methodology describes the process used by a researcher, which can depend on the assumptions they make as well as the purpose of the research, methods refers to the range of tools used to gather and then interpret data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Divergent approaches have dimensions of comparison at a structural and societal level. For example, a positivist approach may seek to produce an abstraction of reality using a mathematical model, whereas an interpretivist may seek to analyse language and terminologies to establish meaning. However, the researcher must also suit their methodology to what they are researching. The approach I have taken to the research presented in this study is qualitative, corresponding to the definition given by Denzin and Lincoln as a situated activity consisting of a series of interpretive, material processes to make the world visible (2005, p.3). I have studied the case in its natural setting, trying to make sense of what I have seen, using the meanings people bring.

### Case Study

I chose to use a case study approach to my inquiry as I wanted to explore the everyday context of teaching and learning. The circumstances I found myself working in meant I wanted to tell the story of what was going on in this setting and the practice I encountered. Although I started out thinking that I might be making comparisons between settings, the more data I gathered, the more it became clear that the school itself was doing something different, and I wanted to do it justice by a full description. Although I would be writing the study, it was important to be sensitive to the fact that a case needs to 'tell its own story'. An exploratory case study allows the researcher to use a range of tools to gather and examine data but also entails sensitivity to the different contexts - social, cultural and political (Stake, 2003). As stated previously, my aim was not necessarily to draw conclusions, but to understand educational action.

Case study is a contested concept. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) trace its emergence in the field of education in UK and North America in the 1970s and 1980s, claiming that it was a reaction against the heavily quantitative bias in educational

research at the time. They see it as an approach that was able to deepen understanding in real contexts rather than simply providing decontextualised evidence. Yet case study research has a long and distinguished tradition across a number of disciplines such as medicine and law, for example. Stenhouse felt it was a means of capturing the complexity of educational action, but that a key component of the approach was that it had to be verifiable (1979). Although the approach shares some common features with ethnography (Creswell, 2007), it is distinguished by the desire to understand a single issue or problem, rather than how an entire culture works. Stenhouse (1979) also pointed out other assumptions made in ethnography which distinguish it from case study. Ethnography, for example, presupposes a lack of familiarity with the setting studied, whereas educationalists tend to be familiar with settings where research occurs. My own research design, therefore, is strongly influenced by the key features of ethnographic research. It shares four features outlined below:

- 1) A strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomenon, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them
- 2) A tendency to work primarily with unstructured data, that is data that has not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories
- 3) Investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case in detail
- 4) Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretations of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with qualification and analysis playing a subordinate role at most. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 248)

My design shares those elements which distinguish it from ethnography identified by Creswell (2007) and Stenhouse (1979) because I am seeking to understand a specific case, not an entire culture, and I have some familiarity with the setting.

Writers on case study research differ in their views as to whether it is a strategy of inquiry, a methodology or a comprehensive research strategy (Yin, 1993; Merriam, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Stake, a major contributor, states that it is not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied (2003), whereas Creswell regards

it as a methodology itself, seeing it as an object of study as well as a product of the inquiry (2007, p.73). There is widespread agreement, however, on what the approach entails. It is an in-depth study of a bounded system (or systems) over time through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information. The outcome reports a case description and case-based themes (Smith, 1978; Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 2007).

### **Identifying the Case**

Silverman (2006) argues against simply going out into the field and making observations without having some clear focus, and Miles and Huberman point out that unfocused research can be a recipe for disaster, as everything looks interesting at the outset for the inexperienced researcher (1984, p.28). My own first forays into the 'field' were not sharply focused, but I did have some idea of the themes I wanted to investigate. At various stages during the work, I have been diverted into considering associated issues where themes seem interconnected and fresh reading seems only to add ideas. The need to remain focused has been a constant. So has the concern to be able to communicate with clarity ensuring that my findings are valid, thereby reducing the likelihood of misrepresentation. I have needed to ensure that there is 'correspondence' between what Stake terms the senses of 'situation, observation, reporting and reading' (2003, p.147), using my eyes as well as my ears in both observations and interviews (Stimson, 1986; Perakläyä, 1989).

As a case study, I have used both description and interpretation to present my findings. Reading the descriptions (Classroom Interactions, chapter 5) will give an impression of what is going on in classrooms in the school. The realistic narration used will, I hope, add to the richness. I have been guided by what the case indicates as important, supported by peers, my supervisors and those researched, but I have made decisions based on what I believe to be important to include and what merits omission, thus defining and delineating the case. I have attempted to find the story that best represents the case (Stake, 2003, p.144), but it has been my decision to decide the criteria of representation.

As explained in Chapter 1, I happened upon the venue by chance. My initial visit to the school piqued my interest; I wanted to find out more. St Luke's is a larger than average primary school, of Christian denomination. It has a management structure

that includes a head teacher, deputy head teacher, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, phase leaders for Key Stages 1 and 2, and a number of subject leaders. In these respects, it is no different from many inner-city primary schools across England. However, what intrigued me was the fact that the school had devised its own curriculum based on the community it serves and needs of the pupils, integrating the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013). This approach, as discussed in more detail in chapter five, is described as 'concept-led'. It has similarities to an enquiry model of curriculum design, as opposed to the prevailing objectives model. Teaching focuses on greater opportunities for child choice and independence, adapting the learning environment by removing classroom furniture to enable greater pupil mobility and choice of whom they work with, using a 'worked example' approach derived from an interpretation of Bloom's concept of Mastery (1968). Central to this is P4C. Question-raising and class discussions have been integrated into the curriculum so that, although there are discrete Philosophy lessons, P4C is also evident in a number of other curriculum areas. Integrating P4C in this way is different from what I have observed in classrooms in other schools where it is taught as a discrete subject.

Over time and subsequent visits, my initial aim evolved. I was still interested in looking at teacher pedagogy in the use of this thinking skills programme, but I wanted to focus on the use of talk. The final research questions, focusing on talk, pedagogy and classroom relationships, have settled, although I have returned to them, as I have to the data, often. The phenomenon that I regard as the case cannot be pinned down to a single event or series of events, but is rather what is going on within one school over an extended time period. It does not have a single locus. It is not limited to one teacher's practice or one child's learning, but is rather a series of connected experiences: a flow. In this respect it corresponds with Yin's description of a case study as a contemporary phenomenon where the boundaries between the case and the context are not clear (1994, p.13). Despite finding this difficulty myself over the evolution of the study, the case has become clear to me through gathering data. It is how teachers and children in a school use talk to think together, and how this influences classroom relationships. The context for it is the individual school and how it organises learning and teaching, but in the wider context of a national system where neither thinking skills nor talk are prioritised in curriculum.

## **Cases within the case**

The decision to include two mini case studies of the teachers Amy and Rachel (see Chapter 5) was taken to enable a closer analysis and comparison of their approaches. It came about as I considered the differences in their teaching styles and relationships with pupils when teaching philosophy lessons. The studies are of necessity impressionistic. What they illuminate is how the two teachers' different approaches reveal different understandings of pedagogy and different stages of professional reflection.

## **Finding an identity within the setting**

Having been a teacher for many years, I was very familiar with the type of venue where my research took place. This meant that I carried with me a host of preconceptions and expectations. As Silverman points out, whatever we observe is impregnated with assumptions (2006, p. 12). During my research I found myself in a different relation to both pupils and staff which I have had cause to reflect upon throughout the process. It has also required some decisions. In my role as a University mentor, I make regular visits to schools. I observe student teachers, talk to children about their learning while the lesson is taking place, and give feedback. The role is intended to be supportive, but it has a judgemental element to it. There is a hierarchy in the relationship. A teaching placement is a module on a university course that they can pass or fail. Many students make enormous efforts to ensure that their observed lessons are 'all singing, all dancing' and, despite advice to the contrary, can regard an observation as a 'performance' with themselves centre stage.

My role as researcher was different. I was not there to support or judge, but to observe and find out all I could about what was going on. I wanted to be less obtrusive, although I was aware that teachers could be 'putting on a performance' for me. In trying to establish a different persona, I deliberately 'dressed down'. Most primary schools currently have a dress code. A male member of the teaching staff would usually be expected to wear a suit and this school was no exception. So I dressed differently, in cord trousers and a sweater. On my first visit, I was asked how I wished to be known. Here again, I made a mental effort to dissociate myself from

my familiar role and opted to be called by my first name: small alterations, but ones which I hoped would enable me to redefine myself in this new relationship (Wragg, 1999).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.49) suggest a number of problematic features of fieldwork identity. These are: whether the researcher is known to be a researcher by all of those being studied; how much or what is known about the research and by whom; what sort of activities the researcher engages in and how this locates her in relation to the category and group membership of the participants; what the orientation of the observer is; and to what extent she consciously adopts the orientation of insider/outsider.

Both staff and children at St. Luke's were used to regular visitors. It is a 'teaching school' and is involved, through a partnership with a number of schools and a local University, with the training of teachers. The head teacher is a National Leader of Education (NLE) and two other members of staff are Local Leaders of Education (LLE). Visitors to the school come to observe the teaching and learning and innovative curriculum. During my visits, I was known to be a researcher but also as a teacher educator by the staff whom I interviewed or observed. Although my initial contact and interest was to observe the teaching of *Philosophy for Children*, I did not describe my research in detail. Although I could not be considered an 'insider' in the truest sense, as discussed by Schuetz (1944), as I did not have a sense of shared identity with the group, nor access to a shared history, I believe that there were a number of shared assumptions. I did not experience the tensions which arise for an insider researcher who is both employee and researcher (Morse, 1998), nor did I have a proximity to the setting which could influence my 'clear sightedness' (Schuetz, 1944) and lead me to perceive what I expected to (Hockey, 1993). However, I did identify with the teachers, as I would on a visit to any primary school. Being familiar with primary pedagogy and practice and common routines in primary classrooms had a double-edged effect. It meant when I noticed different practices, I would be keen to pursue this further in interview with the teachers after the lessons, or later in the research in conversations. But it also might mean that there were aspects of pedagogy that I took for granted. My familiarity with P4C and enthusiasm for this approach similarly had an effect on my relationship with Amy to whom, as P4C lead and the person who had invited me to the school in the first place, I felt

some allegiance. And, although these feelings were never discussed explicitly, they may have had an effect on my observations of her teaching and the interviews I conducted with her.

So it is that I do not feel that my identity as a researcher corresponds neatly to either of the insider/outsider binary definitions. At some times and with some people I was more of an outsider, but at others and with others an insider. For that reason, my stance more accurately corresponds to what Thomson and Gunter (2011) describe as the fluidity of the academic researcher working with/in school, borrowing the concept of fluidity of identity from Bauman (2000). Their reflections on working in a school reveal that as researchers from a University but with a background in school, they faced some similar issues: at times their positions being highly contingent with more than one in operation at one time.

#### **4.4 Data collection methods**

The choice of research methods was based on the nature of the questions I had set. It was important to be able to see first-hand what was going on, but also be able to triangulate this with participants' perceptions, hence the choice of both observations and interviews. My choice of methods to find out and interpret what was going on in the case therefore corresponds to what Sanger (1996, p.68) describes as the 'observation, interview, documentation triptych', emblematic of qualitative research.

The three visits I made to the school were each six months apart. I observed four teachers (two of these on multiple occasions) and held interviews with all of them, two of them on two separate occasions. I also interviewed the deputy head teacher and a student teacher. I made seven separate observations and conducted three child focus group interviews. There were eight children in each focus group, a mix of boys and girls from across different age groups, from year 2 to year 6, making a total of twenty, as four children participated on two focus groups which were conducted six months apart. I also collected other information from the school over time including: data from the school website; photographs of classrooms and other areas of the school; some teacher planning; and samples of children's work. In addition, I

have a field notebook which contains reflections and notes taken from chance or informal conversations and observations. All of these have been used in both the descriptions of the case and in drawing together the key themes.

## **Observation**

Observation has a significant role in education. Teachers use it for assessing learners' attainment and progress and for making pedagogical judgments and interventions to enhance their behaviour, curiosity and learning (Rozsahegyi, 2019). Head teachers and line-managers use it as part of teacher appraisal and monitoring. It is also used in training and mentoring and is now a commonplace part of professional practice in schools. These approaches are evaluative. But for the educational researcher, it can also be a key way of gathering data to answer their questions.

As I was studying a case in its naturalistic setting, observation was my key data collection method. Observation offers significant advantages as, unlike some other methods, such as questionnaires or interviews, it gives closer access to what is actually happening. It also has flexibility. It is discovery-based and allows for the emergence of new ideas and lines of thinking during the research (Newby, 2014). Sanger states that, 'there are 1001 stories in any half hour in the classroom' (1996, p.4), a statement echoed by Wragg (1999) who sees observation, supported by interviews, as an important means to explore classroom teaching which he characterises as a rapidly moving set of activities. This can be a drawback or distraction of the method, but it is this variety and richness which gives the observer the opportunity to provide 'thick' descriptions of the setting (Geertz, 1973).

Sanger identifies notions of 'foreground', 'background' and 'significance' in making observations. Seeing is not observing, he argues. In some powerful reflections on classroom observations, he demonstrates just how easy it is to be blind to what is in the foreground of what is going on, as we have taken it for granted, and only focus on what he describes as the background (1996, p. 5). As an experienced observer, I was used to looking at classrooms, teaching and learning in a certain way. However, as a researcher I was problematising it, making something I am familiar with strange, and looking at it with new eyes (Peim, 2018). I have learned through the approach I have taken, to be sensitive to other aspects of the classroom and what goes on

during lessons. But I have also needed to adopt other strategies to confirm what I saw. For example, most of the lessons were discussed in interview with the teachers afterwards and on the first occasion I sent a full transcript of a lesson observation to Amy, my principal contact with the school. I also opened myself to pursuing what caught my interest, looking at body language, gesture, personal space and classroom layout as well as verbal exchanges and interactions between teacher and pupils, and between pupils (Wragg, 1999). Individual teachers had different styles of pedagogy and classroom management, as discussed in Chapter 5. Although it would be easy to suggest that I adopted the same stance in all classrooms, this would not be an accurate reflection. As discussed above, I felt more at ease in Amy's classroom than Rachel's, for example. This may reflect the fact that I felt we had more in common, but Rachel may have felt more 'under scrutiny'. To this extent, my presence in class had some effect on both my own behaviour and that of the children and the teacher.

Observation can be characterised as 'participant' or 'non-participant', depending on the level of the researcher's interaction with the context being observed. In an ethnographic study, a researcher may be fully involved in the life of a community she is researching, so that explanations for what is being witnessed emerge over time (Denscombe, 2017). However, a 'non-participant' observer would seek to remain detached and distant so as not to influence the outcomes of the research (Papatheodorou, Luff and Gill, 2013). This is more consistent with a scientific or testing approach. My own approach fell somewhere between the two. During observations, I would spend much of the time hastily scrawling notes of my impressions of the situation and verbal exchanges. I did not record the classroom observations. However, there were times also when I talked to the pupils and the teacher or teaching assistant. I usually talked to a couple of pupils or groups of pupils during the course of each lesson. On these occasions, I would ask questions whilst children were working to establish a fuller understanding of what they were doing, or of what they understood they were doing, or how they felt about it. Sometimes I talked to the teacher too. In the classes where I observed most (Amy and Rachel's), this would be to share an observation of what a child had said or done, in an air of interest or admiration. Sometimes the teacher approached me too.

Marc, for example, explained to me the rationale of the approach he was taking to what he was doing, which he further explained in interview after the lesson.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) identify differences between the observer as participant and the participant as observer. I was certainly the former. On the few occasions I did participate, it was not to guide or teach the children, but merely to ask questions or make a comment. If I had tried to join in the teaching, this would be neither pedagogically nor morally appropriate - nor was it what I wanted to do. However, neither could I be a 'fly on the wall' as a strictly non-participant observer standing in one place for the entire lesson (Baker, 2006). In fact, this would have drawn more attention to me. Instead, I moved around the classroom to get a different perspective of what was going on.

Observations usually correspond in some degree to being described as 'structured' or unstructured although, as with participant and non-participant, these are two ends of the spectrum and, in practice, they are often combined and come at some points in between. Structured observations, sometimes called 'systematic', share much in common with structured interviews and have pre-determined categories. They are more typical of a quantitative approach and allow the opportunity for statistical analysis (Bryman, 2008). A narrative approach, by contrast, records what is seen and heard in the form of field notes. A mixed approach can allow for recording impressionistic details and narrative of what is going on, punctuated by a particular structure, like time sampling, for instance (Mukherji and Albon, 2017).

I did not have any framework which I imposed on the study. I wanted to keep my observations to a narrative description of what I saw, but to be open. I recorded events in the classroom, noting details of layout, resourcing and other objects, but especially exchanges between the teacher and pupils, and pupils with each other. I did not have permission to record the lessons in any way, so I could not capture everything that transpired, but relied on noting what captured my attention in a more impressionistic manner, whereas my interviews were audio-recorded and the transcripts are verbatim. My initial approach of being open to what the setting was telling me, in keeping with my educational philosophy, changed over time. I became more focused, looking for certain behaviours in both children and teachers, as I gathered more data and themes began to emerge.

I have included here a short demographic table of the teachers I observed, for ease of reference:

Table 1: Teachers observed

Teacher (pseudonym)	Role	Years' teaching experience
Amy	Year 6 teacher and P4C leader Local Leader in Education (LLE)	6 years
Rachel	Year 6 teacher and R.E. leader	3 years
Carol	Year 2 teacher and mathematics leader	10 years
Marc	Year 5 teacher	Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT)

## Interviews

Silverman (2006) states that interviews are the most commonly used tools in qualitative research. They are the research method of choice because they are relatively economical in terms of time and resources (Silverman, 2006), but also enable the collection of rich data allowing the interviewer to probe her understanding of an issue (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Silverman also poses the question, why interview if you are in the process of examining what happens in the world and what people do in real life? For me the answer is twofold. Interviews enabled me to confirm what I saw during observations, or have a different explanation or interpretation offered. They also enriched my understanding of the phenomenon of the case by adding other perspectives, both personal (from teachers and children) and historical, as when I interviewed the deputy head about the journey that had led to changes in curriculum and approaches to teaching in the school. Atkinson and Coffey (2002) warn us to be wary of over-simplistic distinctions between methods that are natural and those that are contrived. My classroom observations could be considered contrived, bearing in mind I chose what to note down and ignore.

I used semi-structured interviews as they allowed me to pursue key themes but with flexibility (Bryman, 2008). My initial focus, on teacher reflection on their own pedagogy, was retained in subsequent interviews. But over time and with further experience, I was led by the teachers and my own inclinations, as to what to follow

up. In my first teacher interview, I made the mistake of using jargon which the teacher was unfamiliar with, asking a long and unwieldy question. But I soon found I adapted, in the event ditching some of the questions I had come with. For Holstein and Gubrium, interviewees are not 'passive vessels waiting to be tapped' (2004, p.151), but the interviewer is also an active participant. As Rapley points out, the interviewer can often encourage, pursue an issue raised by the interviewee, or simply listen (2004). On several occasions, I was intrigued to follow some of the reflections made by teachers. One of these was a significant finding, I felt, and confirmed by the child focus groups. This was the issue of children deliberately choosing to debate with those who had contrasting views. Rapley further suggests that, although the interview may be conversational, it is not a conversation. The interviewer retains some level of control, even if it is only when to open and close various topics and the interaction as a whole (2004, p.26). Over time, I found that I ceased using interviews. I am not sure that this was a conscious decision but, on my final visit to the school, I made three observations and had conversations with the teachers afterwards. I did not regard them as 'interviews' and they were not recorded, although I did make notes on them. Although these could not be described as, 'naturally occurring talk' in the sense defined by Silverman (2006, p.202), neither are they 'researcher provoked data' in the way that interviews and focus groups are. Maybe I had just become more confident in my understanding of what I was doing, or more at ease with the teachers. On looking back, I find I took the opportunity on these occasions to make statements which were provocative, possibly more so than I would have been in the more formal context of an interview. In both cases, my statements provoked useful discussions. When I asked Rachel, for example, if the children had learned anything in the lesson which was a mathematics-based philosophical enquiry, she explained how the lesson itself had, in part, been intended to help some children who had a poor motivation towards the subject, to see it in a different light. This led me to a re-evaluation of what I had seen. I still felt it had fallen into a common trap some of philosophical enquiries, by trying to approach some of the biggest questions with insufficient context, but I could now see its value in a different way.

My interview with Jack, the deputy head teacher would be better defined as an 'informant interview' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). I was only able to ask

very few questions. I believe that this was maybe because he is accustomed to giving talks. He has written two books about curriculum planning, so he regarded me as another audience.

## **Working with Children**

Woodhead and Faulkner (2008) suggest that children's active participation in the research process leads to significant knowledge gains if their views, perspectives and feelings are accepted as genuine. In my study children's views provide valuable, and essential data. I was committed to doing research with children rather than on them - an approach beginning to gain some ground (Barker and Weller, 2003) - although they could not be regarded as participatory researchers themselves (Kim, Sheehy and Kerawalla, 2017). My rationale for involving children was their proximity to the topic. They are the primary recipients and excluding children's perspectives would have ignored one of the key perspectives on classroom reality. In this respect the research meets the political and moral concerns that children's voices should be more clearly heard and acted upon, as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). This view is confirmed by the British Educational Research Association which states,

Children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity (BERA, 2018 p.15).

I chose to use focus groups with children as I felt they would be better able to articulate their feelings in a group situation. The ethics of conducting research with children and the necessary steps taken to ensure consent are discussed below, but their engagement was total. The nature of a focus group is such that the researcher acts more like a facilitator (Noaks and Wincup, 2004, p.80), requiring flexibility and the ability to stand back from the discussion so that group dynamics can emerge. This was very much evident in these sessions. Children were for the most part self-assured and needed no prompting. This may be a symptom of the fact that they were used to discussions and enjoyed articulating their views and opinions or, as discussed below, because they were the knowledgeable informants. However, it may also be due to the children showing allegiance to the school. Their teacher was, after all, in the room during these sessions. During conversation, children stimulated reflections in each other; they had clear ideas about their lessons. This was perhaps

more surprising as they did not all come from the same class and so were not all familiar with each other. Each group had six children who ranged from seven to eleven years of age, but the discussion was in no way dominated by the older children.

The issue of the potential power imbalance in the situation, when my role could easily be blurred with that of the teacher, did not seem to have much effect. The children's views did not lack a critical dimension. In some cases children from lessons I had observed were present and so there was some reference to the lesson. Maybe an important reason why they felt empowered to talk was my status as an outsider with less knowledge than them. I made it clear that I had come to find out more about the subject which potentially diminished the presumed greater knowledge of the adult (Mayall, 2000). The most interesting aspect of the dynamic of the focus groups was that the children chose each other to speak. Each group very quickly adopted the same approach as in P4C lessons. Whenever a child wanted to speak after another had expressed their point of view, she/he would put a hand out flat in front of them and the previous speaker would choose the next one, with no involvement from me.

## **4.5 Ethical Considerations**

Principles of ethical conduct in research are important for two main reasons - firstly, to protect human rights and avoid harm to any of the individuals involved, including the researcher. The British Educational Research Association states as its first guideline that,

Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice, in recognition of both their rights and of differences arising from age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant characteristic (BERA, 2018, p.6).

The second reason is to ensure the integrity of the research and hence public confidence in its veracity. For Simons (1995, p.436), ethics are defined as the rules of conduct that enable us to 'operate defensibly' in the political contexts in which we work to conduct educational research.

## Consent

The UK's Economic and Social Research Council's (2015, p.4) research ethics framework sets out six key principles. The first principle asserts that research participants should take part voluntarily and their rights, dignity and autonomy should be respected and protected. Informed consent is considered one of the fundamental concepts of research. The first step in gaining consent for my study was to seek ethical approval from the University where I am studying. Outlining my proposed methodology, I was required to provide a step-by-step account of my approach, to be updated, should any significant changes occur. The full application for ethical approval was made in September 2018 and granted in October 2018 (see Appendix 2). Once approval had been granted, I was able to approach the school.

Diener and Crandall's classic (1978) text identifies four main areas that recur in different guises in social research. The second of these is whether there is a lack of informed consent. Homan (1991) notes that observing the principle of informed consent is easier said than done, especially in ethnographic and social research where the researcher is likely to come into contact with a wide spectrum of people. I took every step I could to ensure that I could gain it. I notified my contact, Amy, of my interest to start paying visits in November 2018 and sent her my ethical approval form. When she had gained verbal permission from her head teacher she notified me. In this respect I was following BERA's suggested guidelines in gaining, 'participants' voluntary informed consent at the start of the study' (2018, p.9). Thereafter, throughout the study I sought consent verbally at each stage, stressing that participants had the right to opt out at any stage during the proceedings. For example, at the beginning of each lesson I observed, I checked that my presence was expected, and the teachers were happy for me to proceed, as I did not have a form of written consent from them, only the understanding from Amy.

Working with focus groups of children and gaining informed consent from them, however, contained a dilemma. I could justify the fact that my research would not intentionally cause, 'harm, distress, anxiety, pain or any other negative feeling to participants' (Oliver, 2010, p.15), but the issue of consent from children is not easy to navigate. While I can argue my 'need to know', children in the age range I was dealing with are rightly regarded as having a degree of vulnerability. BERA describes

their circumstances as potentially limiting ‘the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to participate’ (2018, p.15). The steps I took were designed to ensure as closely as possible that they consented. I drafted a letter which the school sent to parents and carers, explaining the nature of my research and requesting they consider if their child could participate. Those who formed my subsequent focus groups were children whose parents had given active consent for their child’s participation. I also made sure at the start of the focus groups that children were happy to participate, and they understood that they could choose not to answer or withdraw.

I took every step to ensure the collaboration and approval of those responsible (BERA, 2018, p.15), but there was both the power imbalance at play in the teacher-pupil relationship in a school and the presence of the teacher in these focus groups to consider when making judgements of the validity of this instrument. There is much discussion about the age at which children can be considered able to make such decisions. Indeed ‘assent’ is possibly a more correct term as in law, at this age, children cannot be considered able to give consent. Hill (2005) suggests the age of nine could be considered appropriate for the giving of consent (this would only include half of the children in my focus groups), whereas others, such as Lindsay (2000), believe a wider range of considerations should come into play, such as cognitive ability, emotional status, knowledge and the nature of the task itself. Yet not to include them in my study would surely not be respecting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as discussed previously (UNICEF, 1989). With the focus of this study being on the use of talk through thinking skills with young children, it would be ironic, not to say indefensible, if their voices were not represented.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Diener and Crandall’s third consideration is whether there has been an invasion of privacy (1978). Privacy is invariably linked to anonymity and confidentiality. I have made every attempt in the write-up of this research to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants, following the BERA’s suggestion of employing, ‘fictionalising approaches when reporting’ (2018, p.21). This has also been the case with the school itself and where it is located.

In relation to confidentiality, in recognition of the legal requirements as stipulated by the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), article 13 (European Parliament and Council of European Union, 2016), participants in my research are entitled to know what data about them is being used, by whom and have the right of access to any personal data that is being stored. Information I have gathered is all stored electronically on a password protected doubly encrypted hard drive. This means it is inaccessible to anyone but me. In addition to the use of pseudonyms within the research, there is no information, even with that encrypted on the hard drive, which would lead to the identification of individuals. My field notes, are also kept on secure premises.

## **4.6 Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the quantitative researcher (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). However, the relevance of the concepts has been the subject of some dispute amongst qualitative researchers and, even when these terms are used, some clarification of their meaning for qualitative research is required (Bryman, 2008). Reliability, for example, is commonly understood to mean the degree to which a study can be replicated using the same instruments and research design. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) point out that it would be difficult even in the same setting to freeze circumstances to enable the study to be replicated in exact detail. This is certainly true for the current study, where staff changes mean that two teachers no longer work at the school. Internal reliability, a similar concept to inter-observer validity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) however, is something that was ensured. There was only one researcher, thus no need to agree about focuses in observation and interviewing between different people.

Validity concerns whether the research design is strong enough to bear credible conclusions, or whether the evidence provided from the research can bear the weight of the interpretation put on it (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006, p.1). Whereas internal validity refers to this concept and the extent to which there is congruence between observations and concepts (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982), external validity refers to the degree to which the findings can be generalised across social settings. This latter concept is not appropriate to the current study which, as an individual

case, cannot be expected to produce findings which are generalisable. Findings will shed more light upon the case itself, which may improve understanding of practice (Stake, 2003).

### **Credibility and triangulation**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the adoption of alternative terms to assess the validity and reliability of qualitative research, the two primary criteria being trustworthiness and authenticity. Within the criterion of trustworthiness, the notion of credibility is significant in the extent to which accounts of social reality are acceptable by others and I present here some of the steps which I have taken to ensure the trustworthiness and thereby the credibility of the study.

The first consideration is triangulation. Triangulation as a concept is ultimately derived from the natural sciences and is a process of cross-checking. It can, however, be used in qualitative research to confirm findings and is described by Denzin as an approach which relies on multiple sources of data or observers (1970). In fact, triangulation can be cross-methods or across respondent groups (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In the current study, I was able to use triangulation to confirm findings using both approaches. It was useful to follow-up on assertions made by teachers about children's behaviour and strategies they used and vice-versa. I also used it to confirm with teachers what I had noted in lesson observations. A further approach which I took initially, but did not continue with, was 'respondent' or 'member validation'. Member validation attempts to ensure correspondence between different perspectives (Bryman, 2008). After my first visit to the research setting, I sent my transcript of interview and notes taken during the lesson observation to Amy my first participant, for her views on their authenticity. I had no response other than thanking me. On reflection, I may have continued with this approach, had I had a response, but I can also see that it contains drawbacks, including possible defensive responses or offence taken. However, maybe the strongest critique of this approach is made by Bryman when he notes that even though the researcher may receive a corroborative response, he will still need to make a further leap through the development of concepts and theories, 'to provide a social science frame for the resulting publication' (2008, p.378).

## **Transferability and thick description**

My study corresponds to what Geertz terms ‘thick description’ (1973). It provides rich details of a case, of how teachers and children within classrooms in a school use talk to think together and how this influences classroom relationships. Although not immediately transferable, in the common meaning of the word, it provides an in-depth study within a unique context. As Lincoln and Guba put it, whether these findings ‘hold in some other context or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue’ (1985, p.316). The aim of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the case to help inform practice in the areas of curriculum design, pedagogy and classroom relationships. Whilst not generalisable, implications of the findings for teacher education, continuing professional development of teachers and for primary education are considered in the final chapter.

## **4.7 Approach to data analysis**

For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) there is no single or correct way to analyse qualitative data. The issue is fitness for purpose. In choosing to use a case study approach, my intention was to be able to provide ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of what was going on in the school which was the research venue. I wanted to be able to describe, interpret, raise issues and explore the data. A guiding principle was to keep the flavour of the original observations and interviews. This is why I have provided lesson vignettes and quote verbatim from teachers and children in the presentation and analysis of data (chapter 5). In this way, I believe, I have given voice to them, allowing a more authentic picture to emerge. For Creswell (2007, p. 46), one of the key features of a qualitative research study is its verisimilitude; readers should be able to imagine being in the situation. Denzin (1989) describes a feeling of verisimilitude in the context of thick description arising when the context for and the specifics of social actions are so well described that they produce for readers ‘the feeling that they have experienced or could experience the events being described’ (1989, pp. 83-83). This is something I have striven for in the study.

The approach I have taken to analyse my data is often termed ‘thematic analysis’ (Xu and Zammit, 2020); it involves looking for repeated meanings across a data set which are crucial to the interpretation of the phenomena (Vaismoradi, Turunen and

Bondas, 2013). Using this inductive approach, over time and a series of systematic steps, I was able to become more confident about the themes that were emerging from the data. Yet this approach, and especially the use of the phrase 'emerging', has been criticised by some for the suggestion that the themes simply lay about waiting to be discovered (Taylor and Usher, 2001). As Xu and Zammit (2020) point out, the lack of explicit guidelines on how to go about thematic analysis in education, and the implicit suggestion of a passive role of the researcher, has been critiqued as an 'anything goes approach' (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Yet, despite these criticisms, and the challenge in creating order out of different data sets, the generic approach, as described by Newby (2014), is similar across different methodologies. It involves an active role for the researcher who has to decide what is relevant, and to classify and interpret meanings from the data. In fact, this can at times feel overwhelming. I would concur with Marshall who states that the process of 'coding' or reorganising and reconstructing the data to be able to extract information from it can, 'wreck your head', leading at times to feelings of frustration, confusion and self-doubt (2002, p. 60). Newby identifies four stages in the analysis process: preparing the data; identifying basic units of data; organising data; and interpretation of data (2014 pp. 463-4). These stages are by no means sequential but involve frequent revisiting and review. My own experience was that the very nature of beginning to prepare the data meant that as I was in the process of typing up classroom observations, for example, I was making notes of themes that I felt might be relevant. Transcribing interviews and the focus groups of children likewise created pause for thought about key questions such as whether to transcribe the pauses and speech fillers, like 'ah' or 'um'. I decided, for example, to note when words were spoken with emphasis or when there was a drop in tone or hesitation, as these were indicators, as much as the words themselves, of the interviewee's feelings about what they said. In my transcription a participant's emphasis is indicated by the word being in bold.

### **First phase of analysis**

My first attempt to analyse the data was after my first two visits to the school, after transcribing the staff and child focus group interviews and observations. At this stage I was definitely doing what may be described as 'searching for themes' (Xu and Zammit, 2020 p.6) and following my instinct. Some themes such as 'classroom

relationships' have endured. Others, like 'creating a safe space to discuss difficult issues', have been subsumed. My writing at this stage was descriptive. I was operating at the surface level of the data and taking it at face value. The balance between description and analysis has been a constant preoccupation in this study - the need to do justice to the case for it to be clearly represented matched with my interpretation of what was going on.

### **Second phase of analysis**

I returned to the venue for what was to be the last time in December 2019. I had not planned this to be the final visit but events overtook me and, from the initial lockdown of March 2020 in response to the Covid 19 pandemic, schools have been unable to accept extra visitors. My final visit allowed me to make three further observations which have provided useful data. After this visit I made a second attempt at theming the data which turned out to be quite counter-productive. My recent reading of some new texts, specifically Bernstein, led me down a blind alley. The attempt to fit my data to theory, instead of allowing theory to illuminate the data, was an error as I now realise. But at the time it seemed relevant and useful. I have still used some of this theory in my final analysis, but not as the key element.

### **Third phase of analysis**

The third and final phase of data analysis has provided the opportunity for me to interpret and analyse the data at a deeper level (Newby, 2014). Although there is important description of what is going on in classroom interactions, I have been able to draw out interpretations of these exchanges to discuss the curriculum, pedagogy and relationships in the school. It is these three areas which correspond to the subheadings I have chosen as themes in chapter 5.

### **What was left out**

The decision about what to include and what to leave out was largely determined by the degree of confirmation and triangulation across data and instruments. So, where there was clear confirmation of a theme that was evident in a set of data from observation and confirmed through interview, this would be more likely to be included. There were several omissions. The interview I conducted with a student

teacher, for example, was not included because none of the conversation subject matter related to key themes in the study.

### **Researcher selectivity**

Robson (1993, pp. 374-5) and Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 354-5) identify a series of features which may reflect the subjectivity of the researcher, or the degree to which a researcher is researching themselves, to paraphrase Walford (2001, p.98). Preconceptions, bias, background and agenda will inevitably all influence what is 'seen' and drawn out as data. I have referred earlier in this chapter to steps I took to try and avoid some of these issues arising, but inevitably availability of people and information have influenced this study. It is also true that my first impressions and initial data collection and analysis have affected the path I took in later collection and analysis. This, too, has been part of the journey.

## **4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have outlined the design of the research, identifying the challenges it has presented and explaining the steps I have taken to manage these. This included finding an identity within a setting, where I was clearly not an insider per se, but neither was I wholly an outsider, but rather a researcher with a more fluid identity than might more usually be the case. Problematizing the familiar (Peim, 2018) led me to make changes at a superficial level, like how I dressed and was addressed, but also involved adapting to become sensitive to other aspects of classroom reality. I decided to adopt a case study approach, informed by some ethnographic features (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), to avoid what Elliott (2006) describes as a snapshot experience. I wanted to be able to do justice to the essential complexity of what was going on in the school and how teachers and children behaved in these circumstances, gaining some insight into what van Manen describes as the epistemology of tact (1995) or what Biesta (2013) would term 'phronesis', or practical wisdom. Although observations became the principal research instrument, interviews were also an important tool to understand teachers' perspectives and explanations for their actions. Children's voice is one of the principal themes of the study and so it

was important to be able to gain pupils' views, although, as explained, there are significant ethical implications to be considered.

Case studies draw on both description and interpretation to present their findings. The following chapter, 'Presentation and Analysis of Data' is designed to add richness and detail, aligning with the notion of researchers becoming storytellers and inviting their audience to see through their eyes (Wolcott, 1990). It will also include some interpretation of what has been seen, with the intention of including the meanings and purposes of the people who are their source (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

## Chapter 5: Presentation and Analysis of Data

This chapter sets out to describe and interpret the significant themes that emerged from the data drawn from observations, and what teachers and children had to say in interviews and focus groups.

### 5.1 Curriculum

After my first visit, it soon became apparent that it was not just the practice of *Philosophy for Children* that was different. It was the way it was integrated with the curriculum. Responsibility for curriculum leadership lay with the deputy head teacher, Jack. Amy, my initial contact, managed and oversaw the teaching of P4C. These two had worked closely together over time to fashion the 'concept-led' curriculum. Each term children study a different concept, carefully linked to curriculum subjects like History and Geography and cross-referenced with Religious Education (RE) and Personal, Social and Health and Economic Education (PSHE). Topics are led by a key question. Curriculum planning is focussed around making what might be described as 'social concepts' central to learning. Many of the themes are derived from the PSHE Association's Programme of Study (Key Stages 1-5) (2020) and include such notions as *Resilience, Power and Equality*.

In an interview, Jack gave a detailed explanation of the school's curriculum and its underpinning rationale. His feelings about the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) were clear. It does some things well, '*the sequencing and mapping of propositional content*'. But the school's commitment to planning something different, dating from its publication in 2013,

*'...was born out of a feeling of 'this is horrific. We don't want **this!**' You know, we'd gone through the Rose review and things were looking up...'*

His criticism of the curriculum extended to the latest Ofsted framework for school inspection (Ofsted, 2019) which identifies three 'I's' – Intent, Implementation and Impact - as critical themes. In Jack's view, the 'Intent' element does not take sufficient account of a school's aims and purpose,

*'... what about the stuff that comes before that? Where's the thinking that comes before that, which is around what's the point, what's the purpose of education and if we miss that we're in massive trouble, in my opinion'.*

He may have misinterpreted 'Intent' as it seems to be precisely what he then went on to articulate, explaining the rationale for the journey which has taken the school through several different iterations of curriculum, but with a couple of guiding principles - relevance to children's lives and community, and children's active engagement in their learning.

### **Relevance to children's lives and community**

The choice of curricular themes is ascribed by Jack to the needs of the community. The themes have relevance to children's lives,

*'There are particular concepts which matter more to us because of these kids and this community'.*

Projects are question-led. They cover key subject knowledge from the national curriculum but are approached differently. The concept-led model allows them to explore issues of PSHE and RE, which are otherwise difficult to include in cross-curricular topics. These areas Jack described as,

*'...possibly the two most important subjects that any school teaches ... the kind of concepts you can get into through RE and certainly PSHE... It's that stuff that matters in the world, as opposed to just subjects'.*

As if this did not make it clear enough, he then stated,

*'I think that actually, if schools are not making certainly PSHE central to their work, they are failing kids, ultimately'.*

Jack's description of these as, 'some of the more awkward curriculum areas' was confirmed by a statement made by Amy, who went further to describe P4C discussions as providing opportunities to,

*'... explore concepts that are difficult and... in other areas of learning and other approaches they would be untouchable, or you wouldn't have the opportunity to discuss them'.*

Both teachers believe strongly in the value of discussing issues that children are exposed to in their lives. Both also feel that these are not available to them otherwise through the curriculum. In fact, the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) does not include such areas of learning and, since 2013, PSHE has remained non-statutory (apart from Relationships and Sex Education which became statutory for Key Stage 2 in September 2020).

The projects that I observed in Years 5 and 6 were: *Does Adversity Always Make Us Stronger?*; *Should We Accept Our Place in Society?*; and *How Can We Make Our Mark On The World?*. There were also two mini-projects on *Control* and *Terrorism*. I observed children discussing social class in Edwardian Britain and today; racial prejudice through the case of Stephen Lawrence; artistic achievement through the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat; relative inequalities in wealth and income; and terrorism, religious fundamentalism and prejudice in the wake of the Manchester bombing. These themes allowed children to express aspects of their cultural and social capital which they may otherwise not find a means to. When Amy rather hesitantly states that this approach allows children,

*'...the benefit of bringing the world... or bringing their experience, their understanding of the world into their experience'*.

she is close to Dewey's definition of experience, which he believed should be at the heart of the educational project as, 'the apprehension of material which should ballast and check the exercise of reasoning' (1916, p.267).

A second teacher, Rachel, shared her colleague's commitment to children discussing issues they are exposed to through the home or social media, adding a new element to the rationale, pertinent to her class's discussion of Islam and Isis (figure 3), and Amy's class's consideration of suicide,

*'A lot of our children are talked to sometimes in quite an adult manner at home or might, you know, have things talked to them about the news or they might see a lot of things on social media and addressing those misconceptions is really important because I think they do have a kind of emotional baggage about things almost, from what they read and what they hear'*.

As well as the children bringing their experience of the world into school, it seems Rachel feels that the teacher's role is an important form of mediation, unpicking some of the misconceptions which may arise from what children are exposed to. It provides a safe space to explore information and indeed misinformation or 'fake news'.

All three teachers interviewed seem to be alive to the importance of having a curriculum relevant to them, their life experiences and the community. All three are committed to the moral dimension of education. They see their role as educators in the light of what Aristotle described as 'phronesis' - practical wisdom or judgement

(2003). So, in addition to children achieving the learning outcomes of the national curriculum, and its array of subjects, they regard it as their duty to help them become individuals who are capable of navigating the world around them. In the pursuit of this end, they have devised an approach to the curriculum, underpinned by the use of P4C that contrives to develop children's ability to act with independence and exercise critical judgement. It requires the teachers to make informed judgements as they proceed, and sometimes in the moment. Following Smith, I use the word 'praxis' to identify this 'acting wisely and carefully in a particular situation' (2008, p.65). It is a term first used by Aristotle to mean rational action based on conscious choice, where action is brought about as the product of observation, desires and intellect or reason (2003). This concept is further developed in the section below on the theme of Pedagogy, with reference to two lesson observations.

### **Children's active engagement in their learning**

Jack also explained how the school trialled and abandoned another approach to curriculum several years previously, expanding on his belief in the importance of children's involvement. He often used the word 'creative' as a sort of shorthand for Creative Thinking, one strand of the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills Framework (QCA, 2007), a skills-based approach, from which the school drew inspiration in curriculum design,

*'We realised that it was undoubtedly a creative process, but it was **our** creative process and it was being **delivered at the children** [his emphasis]. Just because we were designing creatively, didn't mean the kids got to think creatively or work creatively. They were passive recipients and they enjoyed it and were engaged... but it was at odds with us having creative thinking at the centre of the curriculum.'*

This statement offers some insight into the recursive process of planning. Identification of the children as 'passive recipients', at odds with the school's intentions, has clear resonance with Freire's critique of what he describes as the, 'banking model of education' where teachers, involved in a traditional pedagogy of reproduction, are seen to make deposits of knowledge in children's accounts (1970, p.57). The point is reiterated when Jack explains Amy's role in supporting staff to plan and use P4C as a pedagogic tool to explore ideas raised through the concept-led approach to curriculum. Teachers are expected to relinquish some control of

content, allowing a joint exploration of ideas, and the opportunity for children to determine the direction of exploration.

The belief in children developing some control over their own learning came from serious concerns with increased levels of dependence and passivity. In an attempt to counteract this the school has adopted an approach to pedagogy which emphasises the children's responsibility in choosing appropriate resources to work with, and in the use of 'worked examples' rather than teacher differentiation of learning tasks.

The school creates conditions which value pupils' cultural and social identity; it enables them to bring their own experiences into school. The commitment to basing learning in situations which children can relate to, encouraging their active involvement in expressing their views and experiences, has clear similarities with Freire's belief that educators must design contexts that develop participatory engagement (Akkari and Perez, 2000). The enquiry-oriented curriculum reflects Wells' approach (1999) or Stenhouse's Humanities Curriculum Project (Norris, 2012). A theme is selected by the teachers, but pupils have some freedom to negotiate the direction it takes.

## 5.2 Pedagogy

The concept-led curriculum, coupled with the teachers' belief about what education is for, sets the scene for how it is enacted in the classroom. For Jack it is all about getting the conditions right. He states that,

*'If it's going to be something that we desperately want our children to develop, we're going to have to think carefully about how that's going to happen, how to facilitate it'.*

Getting the conditions right means developing a classroom climate that gives the children the opportunity to develop independence in their learning. This presupposes a pedagogic approach that enables this. The following section seeks to discuss the pedagogy seen in classrooms at St. Luke's.

## Classroom interactions

In the two lessons below, teacher and child interaction is described and interpreted with a view to understanding precisely what is going on, using an approach which endeavours to do justice to Geertz's concept of 'thick description'. There is an attempt to aid the reader to gain access to 'the social world in which our [sic] subjects live, so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them' (1973, p.24).

First is a P4C lesson, part of which is transcribed in figure 1. The children have gathered on the carpet into an 'enquiry circle' after previously discussing themes that form an aspect of the larger enquiry - '*Is life always in our control?*' They have decided the themes themselves in a previous lesson and discussions have been animated. One group of three girls and a boy have been lying on the floor, propped up on their elbows. They have been listening to each other, but each is also keen for their voice to be heard. In another part of the classroom a group of four girls sit on bar stools at a work surface, one of them making notes of what has been said. They have decided who they want to work with themselves and, when called back to the carpet, sit in these friendship groupings. After the peer group exchange of ideas, Amy, the teacher, is involved in to-and-fro discussion with her pupils. She sits on the carpet in the enquiry circle amongst her class, as if maybe to emphasise a certain equality in discussion. And, although she does not offer her palm out in front of her when she wants to speak, as the children do and as is the norm in the sort of discussion in P4C, her body language is open, with her hands on her knees and her expression one of consideration. At times she smiles encouragingly. We see her taking ideas from the children, listening carefully to their contributions and facilitating discussion. The children are very keen to participate. At one point several girls from one group all want to feed back on their discussion, which leads to a few seconds delay whilst they decide who should do it, whispering among themselves.

On several occasions, Amy facilitates the discussion with a question. Firstly, she elicits the abstract noun 'choice', by asking '*Do we see a theme coming through here?*' Her technique is not to tell, but ask, ensuring that children provide the word themselves. The question is genuine, but also a form of teacher guidance. The new word opens up possibilities of thinking about the issues in a different way. Indeed, it

is taken up later by another child, Tyler, who avers that you can choose to wear a seatbelt or not when in a car which introduces an element of control into whether you get injured or die in this situation. He expresses himself quietly. The children around him seem to listen well and most, though not all, look towards him as he speaks. One child seems to be permanently fiddling with something on the carpet. Tyler is responding to Aneesa's answer to the teacher's question, but it is not delivered in a judgemental or critical tone. The interactions are respectful and his point widens the discussion. Pupils genuinely build on each other's ideas in a fashion that reflects Mercer's description of cumulative dialogue (2000). The dynamic here remains with and between the pupils, even if punctuated at times by the teacher's summary and nudge-like questions, as she elicits or clarifies, using an elaborative style (Reese, Haden and Fivush, 1993). Talk is being used in what Boyd and Markarian describe as, 'the service of a dialogic stance' (2011, p.517). The intentions of the speaker, what is identified as 'the illocutionary force' (Linell and Markova, 1993), are taken up into the stream of the discourse by both pupils and teacher. The relationships are supportive (Alexander, 2017).

The next phase of the discussion reveals something interesting happening. When Amy asks the question, '*Are there always things that are preventable?*' Liam is quick to raise the issue of suicide. The children themselves have chosen the theme of Death, amongst several others. It is a feature of P4C that children get to vote on what question they want to discuss. But, from a teacher's point of view, as with the theme of Terrorism, discussed in the next lesson, this is a sensitive issue. In fact, many teachers, myself included, might try and avoid it, or move quickly on. In this case, far from moving it on, Amy returns to it. For, after Joelle's agreement with Liam's statement that you could decide to kill yourself, another child, Kiran moves the discussion from suicide to serious illness. But, instead of agreeing, or asking the next group to start discussing their theme - 'Dreams' - Amy returns to the theme of suicide. In fact she poses the question, '*If you chose to take your own life would it be wholly your choice if you had heard something about it?*' This is a clear exemplification of the statement she makes in an interview discussed earlier in this chapter, when she refers to the value and importance of being able to discuss concepts that she considers '*difficult*' or '*untouchable even*'. The reference is to the recent case of the suicide of Molly Russell, a teenager very close in age to these

pupils who took her own life after allegedly reading how to do so on her Instagram account. I discussed her decision with Amy after the lesson, trying to show sympathy with her and congratulate her in her treatment of a 'difficult topic' as a fellow teacher, my position as a 'fluid' researcher coming to the fore here (Thomson and Gunter, 2011). She confirmed her deliberate choice in taking the discussion further, thereby discussing a serious and difficult issue in a safe space, enabling any misconceptions that children might have picked up from social media to be addressed.

This decision to refocus the discussion on this contentious issue was, then, certainly deliberate. It may have been that she had planned to discuss it before the lesson. Whether she acted with forethought or she took the decision in the moment, this episode in her teaching corresponds to what I have identified earlier in this chapter as 'praxis' as she is 'acting wisely and carefully in a given situation' (Smith, 2008, p. 65). Amy takes a decision to act in what she considers to be the children's best interests. She does so because she believes it important to be able to discuss it in a safe space to dispel rumours or misconceptions. It is a brave decision, which derives from her convictions, because she is aware that there could be some response from parents who may consider it an inappropriate issue to be discussed in school.

In this lesson, the children are being encouraged to consider and interrogate their reality. Amy is engaged in encouraging them to question what is around them and test their findings by talking to each other. This bears a clear resemblance to the development of Freire's notion of critical consciousness. In his consideration of 'Education and Conscientização' (1974) Freire contrasts this with a less developed understanding of causality which he describes as either 'magical' or 'naïve'. A magical consciousness will not attribute cause, whereas a naïve consciousness sees causality as an established fact. Through a discussion and examination of issues from everyday life, pupils are being encouraged to consider the reasons for things being as they are. They are subjecting reality to scrutiny. Freire states 'The more men [sic] grasp true causality, the more critical their understanding of reality will be' (1974, p. 41). Amy's skill as a teacher lies in deftly and sensitively guiding her pupils in this direction whilst not being intrusive or adopting an authoritative voice (Maybin, 2006) which will inhibit discussion. She seems able to both guide and participate, adopting a dialogic stance (Boyd and Markarian, 2011). Her commitment to acting for the good, in the best interests of the pupils, demonstrates her interpretation of her

role as a moral actor. Her actions in the lesson are drawn from her convictions and experience, as outlined in the mini case study later in this chapter.

**Teacher: The next theme is ‘The food we eat’**

Jerome: I think we have some control, but sometimes we might get forced

Liam: I agree with Jerome but I also wanted to say that poor people don’t have much control.

Mary: If you are in prison, you cannot decide.

**Teacher: Nice loud voice!**

Hajra: I agree with Liam, if you are poor you do not have as much control, but I also agree with Mary too because...

Mohammed: If you are a child you might eat what you are given, because your parents have decided...

**Teacher: So do we see a theme coming through here?**

James: Yes, CHOICE!

*There follows a brief discussion about this.*

Time: 11:01

**Teacher: The next theme is ‘Death’**

*The teacher chooses the first child to express an opinion.*

Aneesa: You have some control if you are sick and don’t take your medicine because then you might die. Or you might be in a car accident and be really badly hurt and die

**Teacher: So what control would you have then?**

Aneesa: None

Tyler: You can make choices – like whether you wear a seatbelt

**Teacher: Are there always things that are preventable?**

Liam: It might not be preventable if you decide to kill yourself.

Joelle: I agree. You could decide to kill yourself.

Kiran: If you just got a disease and died, it would not be your fault.

**Teacher: If you chose to take your own life would it be wholly your choice if you had heard something about it?**

Figure 1: Amy’s lesson on *Control*

A second lesson where pupils explore current social issues focuses on Terrorism. Part of it is reported in figure 3. Here Rachel and her year 6 class compare Isis to Islam. The lesson draws on a religious education theme. It shows how the philosophical approach adopted through the use of P4C and a concept-led

curriculum, manifests itself elsewhere. But it also provides an insight into the culture of the classroom through the interactions during the lesson.

The observation takes place in the last twenty minutes of the lesson. Pupils have spent the time before this continuing to research their knowledge of Islam and Isis. The children sit in a circle on the carpet. They have notebooks or iPads on their laps. The classroom, like Amy's, has several sofas, a few low coffee tables and a worktop with bar stools. There is plenty of space to move around. There is a large painted banner hanging up on the wall reading 'VOTES FOR WOMEN' and elsewhere in the room there is a dining table, set with silver cutlery and candelabras.

The word **TERRORISM** is written on the board together with the question 'Who or what is this hatred and violence targeted towards?' There is also an empty grid copied below (figure 2). Throughout the lesson, the teacher fills out aspects of it as she gets some feedback from the children.

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Islam</b>	<b>Isis</b>
Murder		
War and terrorism		
Suicide		
War and the protection of innocent people		
People of different religious backgrounds		
Religion and nationality		

Figure 2: Grid comparing Islam to Isis

Rachel is young, probably in her mid-twenties. She is slight in build. Her voice (she has a north-eastern accent) is clearly projected and her manner quite stern. Her teaching approach at this point is quite traditional; the lesson feels more teacher-directed than Amy's. Like her colleague, she controls the pace, but to a greater extent, the direction the lesson takes. She stands in front of the seated children and does not sit in the circle with them. At one point, she exhorts a pupil to remember prior learning, '*I am thinking of a thing we watched a video clip about*'. At another, she directs a child to use the language and strategies of P4C, designed to show appreciation of community and the contribution of a peer (Lyle, 2008), '*Fatimah, are*

*you building on that point?*'(her emphasis). This is not a genuine question, but rhetorical – a sort of command to the child to remember to use these strategies. The children are drawing together what they have learned through research and their own knowledge about Islam and Isis. The fragmented feel derives from the fact that she has asked them to recap on what they know. In addition to directing the discussion at key points like Amy she uses questions to enable her pupils to develop their reasoning. She asks, '*Is that like other faiths?*' to introduce an element of comparison in response to Fatimah's statement that Islam is '*really strict*'. A few seconds later, when she prompts Tasneem to supply the example of fasting as evidence of Islam being 'stricter', she uses the technique of elaboration (Goswami, 2015; Alexander, 2017) to enable the pupil to justify her statement; the questioning is designed for the children to keep the momentum in their own reasoning. Several other themes are raised, such as the theme of bias, which she chooses not to develop at this stage in the lesson. However, she is well aware of it and even refers to the child's use of this concept word in an interview, as discussed later in this section. The excerpt demonstrates the extent to which children have become aware, through discussion and research, of several significant recent items of news relating to the theme - like the Christchurch shootings, three months earlier; the Boko Haram kidnappings; the civil wars in Yemen and Syria and the increased levels of knife crime in the UK. Their awareness of these events, and how they can create possible prejudice toward Islam, provides the basis for their reasoning.

Up until this point, the lesson compares with many others I have experienced. The interactions between pupils and teacher mainly take the form of the teacher eliciting answers to encourage the children to make comparisons and develop their reasoning. Rachel's 'persona' is more akin to that of the teacher with the authoritative voice (Maybin, 2006). There is a much clearer delineation of the power relationship between teacher and pupils than in Amy's lesson. Yet the choice of subject matter is different; such a contentious issue is rare in my experience as a subject for discussion in a primary classroom. The children are sitting and offering responses to the teacher's questions, and building on each other's ideas, but the discussion does not flow between teacher and pupil or pupil and pupil, as in the previous example.

However, in an exchange at the very end of the lesson, the atmosphere changes. When Imran states that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is *'using his faith as an advantage'*, there is suddenly complete silence. The children seem to recognise that something different is going on. Their gaze is drawn towards him. This is the beginning of what is a short, but significant exchange. Imran's next statement *'He is portraying himself as God'* fixes their attention decisively. His tone of voice is slightly questioning, slightly unsure. Eyes are now on the teacher. From their silence, it seems as if the children are waiting to see what she will say. Will she agree with Imran? It feels as if his statement is risky, for them and him, hence his uncertain tone of voice. This is a moment of tension. But Rachel does not agree or disagree. She confines herself to the facts, stating, *'He is giving himself that title. No one has given him that title'*.

The lesson feels like it has entered a new phase. It is now a dialogue between the two. She is looking at him, and he at her and, although he is sitting down and she is standing up, there seems to be more equality in the exchange – in the making and taking of meaning. As he grapples and succeeds, to explain himself, using concepts like 'advantage' and 'disrespect', Rachel does not attempt to influence or even guide him. She is not asking questions to elicit answers and try and support his reasoning, or using an authoritative teacher persona, as we have seen her do before in this lesson. Her manner has changed – her body language and tone of voice have become more engaged. Her voice is gentler, and her intonation more modulated, more conversational even. She decides to let the dialogue with Imran run its course. She gives him space to reach his own conclusion and does not attempt to influence him – either to agree or disagree.

The next and final exchange follows a similar format. Once again, Imran makes a statement: in fact, he draws a conclusion based on his previous reasoning. He looks down and states *'That means he is disrespecting God.'* Although he is looking down, his voice is not quiet. He falters a moment, looks up and says with passion *'People will be ashamed'*. Rachel catches his eye as he looks up towards her, but once again, does not agree or disagree, stating instead, *'Possibly people will think that.'* The class remains transfixed. They are witnessing something here. It is not clear whether Imran is breaking new ground in his own thinking, developing his criticality and altering his view of reality, in Freirean terms (Freire, 2004). That is something we cannot know. He may be. But for the other children, witnessing his reasoning and

discussion with the teacher, this is a learning experience – of constructing knowledge with others. It has a potential ripple effect on their own learning and dialogic interaction in the space at that time. It corresponds to the concept of a learning community where the goal is to advance collective knowledge and in so doing, support the growth of individual knowledge (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1994). By witnessing the reasoning of a classmate, the children are developing shared (and individual) knowledge through this social situation (Watkins, 2005).

Peter: Sometimes Isis shout as if it is associated with Islam.

Shiala: They try to recruit.

**Teacher: What do you mean by recruit?**

Jake: They use guns. They are easier to get than in other countries. Here there are not as many guns, but more knife attacks.

Faz: One of the countries is Syria...

Rueben: The first two letters in the names are similar.

Zephaniah: I am not sure if they are a third world country.

**Teacher: Are you saying these countries are poorer?**

Zephaniah: Maybe they come from Yemen or Syria.

Elizabeth: Linking on from that... In Africa they kidnap and get the family to pay a ransom. They might be forced to join Isis.

**Teacher: That's a really interesting point ...**

**Teacher: Can we have more on the Islam side?**

Fatimah: They are really strict.

**Teacher: Is that like other faiths?**

Mushraf : I feel like it's stricter.

Fatimah: When that terrorist attack happened in New Zealand...

**Teacher: Fatimah, are you building on that point?**

Zephaniah: Building on Fatimah's point, people might be biased and think that half Moslems are good and half are terrorists. It shows in History...

**Teacher: So, there is like a long History with prophets?**

Imran: Islamic people come from different countries.

Miriam: Islam is respectful.

Tasneem: There's lots of discipline. No messing around. You have to be respectful (*This girl, like a number of others in class is clearly Moslem. She wears a hijab*)

**Teacher: So you are expected not to mess about. There may be another reason why you have to be disciplined?**

Tasneem: *Looks up inquiringly. Does not speak.*

**Teacher: I am thinking of a thing we watched a video clip about...**

Tasneem: Fasting?

Fatimah: if you have done something wrong in Christianity God gives more forgiveness. In Islam if you do something wrong you might have to do more prayers...

**Teacher: You mean there are consequences?**

**... Teacher: We need to pick up on misconceptions here**

*The teacher then refers to a PP slide on Isis. There is a series of points. She compares with what children have come up with to summarise the difference between Islam and Isis.*

...

**Teacher: So that is quite at odds with what people believe (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi).**

Imran: Yes, he is using his faith as an advantage...He is portraying himself as God

**Teacher: He is giving himself that title. No one has given him that title.**

Imran: That means he is disrespecting God. People will be ashamed.

**Teacher: Possibly people will think that.**

Figure 3: Rachel's lesson on *Terrorism*

## Use of language

During observed lessons at St. Luke's language use, which manifests itself in several different ways, is a further theme of interest. Teachers regularly introduce abstract nouns, what they call concept vocabulary, into discussions. They also encourage children to develop the phrases and syntax consistent with reasoning, listening and responding to other points of view, what Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick describe as 'deliberative discourse' in their thinking skills programme, *Accountable Talk* (2007). There is regular use of conditional and hypothetical constructions, characterised by the use of 'if' and modal verbs, such as 'should', 'may' and 'might'. Along with these constructions, there are sentence openers and phrases that the children have been taught, in order to help facilitate discussion, which derive from the practice of P4C.

The use of abstract nouns is not just evident in themes which recur in the curriculum such as 'Adversity', 'Resilience', 'Hope', 'Society,' or 'Legacy', but is also observable when teachers facilitate discussions in lessons. Examples of this 'pedagogic move'

occur in the out-takes from lessons discussed above. In the lesson on 'Control' for example, Amy provides the noun 'influence' in the following exchange:

Miriam: *We put ours (Thoughts) in between 'Full' and 'No control' because someone else might introduce an idea into your head....so someone makes you think something*

Teacher: *So, are you thinking about the concept of 'influence'?*

Likewise, in figure 3, above, Rachel provides Fatimah with the concept noun 'consequence':

Fatimah: *If you have done something wrong in Christianity, God gives you more forgiveness. In Islam if you do something wrong you might have to do more prayers.*

Teacher: *You mean there are **consequences**?*

The introduction of these nouns enables children to identify the concepts that they are explaining and to begin articulating them. The process of converting their dynamic interpretation of experience in terms of actions and processes using everyday phrases, characterised by the use of verbs, into nouns, objectifies experience. It corresponds to what Halliday, in his 'Language-based theory of learning', termed the 'grammatical metaphor' stage (1993, p.111) and is where children become more familiar with the semantic structure of written language. There is a clear parallel here with what Vygotsky termed 'scientific concepts' (2012) - the systematically related concepts that correspond to the more abstract semantic structures found in written texts. Vygotsky also posits that the move from understanding names and concepts individually (such as chair), to generalised concepts (such as furniture), constitutes progress in learning by beginning to develop an understanding of the relation between the general and the particular. We see something comparable here with children's increasingly frequent use of such abstract terms as 'bias' and their ability to use them in different lessons and discussions.

Teachers discuss children's use of concept vocabulary in interviews. It is something they are aware of as a building block in discussions, even if they are not always consciously aware of the 'pedagogic move' as I have described it above, where almost instinctively in their own teaching they provide the noun at the apposite moment. Amy, for example, identifies abstract nouns, although she does not name

them as such. She gives an example of the word 'hierarchy', used in one of their projects. These words,

*'...which you would not essentially allow them or expose them to that readily in primary learning... allow them to become more articulate [The teacher is] exposing them to things you wouldn't expect them to be talking about... but actually it's giving them the opportunity to begin to change that'.*

The view that they are giving children the means to articulate experience and examine the world runs deep within Amy's belief system. In a similar way Rachel reflects on how the word 'bias', introduced in an earlier project, was used in the observed lesson on Terrorism,

*'Probably I'd say they had very rarely used that word, 'bias' in any other context apart from P4C like they used it today .. and really that's not something that's prompted, I'm not kind of forcing that into the conversation, but they are naturally bringing up concepts that they link with other things...'*

Her comments identify how children are able to apply the use of concept language across contexts, an idea further developed by another teacher, Marc, who suggests that such language initially used in a P4C context becomes part of the children's vocabulary and means of expressing themselves,

*'That's definitely one of those concepts or themes that comes up in P4C a lot, so those bigger more difficult, sort of more grown-up ideas do come out, and then we talk about them, then you clarify different bits within them, then it becomes sort of part of what they will start using around school. They can talk to each other about it'.*

Teachers also suggest that when they use the word 'concepts' with children, it is like activating a muscle or approach that enables children to think differently. Rachel discusses it powerfully with Marc, with reference to the concept of 'fairness' in an RE lesson,

*'I use the idea of drawing out concepts **all** the time, and I actually feel like as soon as I use the word concepts, they're actually much more successful. Like sometimes, if we are doing an RE lesson, well it could be anything really, and it's not as like deep a conversation as I want, I say, 'You need to think about this in a P4C way. You need to think about the concepts'.*

The use of this concept vocabulary is also evident in children's recorded work. In the lesson with the theme of 'Control' 'Hajra' decided she wanted to record her work visually as a road with paths diverging, one labelled as 'distraction' and the other

'opportunity'. The path of opportunity is strewn with words such as challenges, victory, confidence, practice, concentration, trust and chances.

It would seem, then, that teachers are assisting children by providing them with what Freire termed the 'dominant syntax' which he felt was necessary for children (or illiterate adults) to learn to empower themselves to become agents in their own lives and 'articulate their voices in the struggle against injustice' (Freire, 1996). As discussed previously, Bernstein similarly stated that the 'vertical discourse' of school language tended towards analysis, whereas everyday communication, which he termed 'horizontal discourse', is characterised by narrative. He believed that the preponderance of vertical discourse in school differentially disadvantaged and 'regulated the consciousness' of children from poor social backgrounds, with its focus on the transmission of curriculum content and the preponderance of IRF teacher question and pupil one-word answers - what he called a 'lexical pedagogic code' (2003, p.207). His alternative, which envisaged greater opportunities for discussion, a more participative role for the pupils and a closer relationship between them and their teachers – a 'syntactic pedagogic code' - seems to be borne out from what was observed in St. Luke's. Here we see teachers engaging pupils in the use of their own everyday language and helping convert it into such higher level 'vertical discourse' to empower them to use it as a tool for analysis of their social situations. Curriculum content and the pacing of lessons also enable pupils to have more of an agentive role. Interestingly, Bernstein's suggestion that 'most of the tables or desks would have to be removed' (2003, p. 208) to allow each child freedom of movement is also realised.

Lesson observations are also scattered with examples of syntax consistent with reasoning. Pupils listen, respond to and build on others' points of view as indeed they did in the focus groups consistently. This was not something I expected, but was an example of how embedded this approach to discussion has become. They also chose members of the group to speak. The exchange below illustrates it with the phrases highlighted:

*Zeph: **Linking on to Liam's idea...** we try not to just pick our friend who has a hand out who's ... said something a couple of times. It encourages other people to speak so they can like participate in P4C*

Vernon: **Just like what Liam said**, we try to encourage other people we haven't even spoken to, to hear their opinions and ideas about that concept... that stimulus...

Elizabeth: **I want to add on to Vernon because** in P4C we don't make friends, but by speaking to other people you can like listen to people's ideas because everybody's unique.

As well as identifying agreement, or building on each other's statements, phrases with conditionals are used by children to postulate and clarify,

Karanpreet: *I think you do and you don't have control. **For example, if somebody lies to other people, they might get a strong reaction...***

Abdul: **I agree with that position**

Amy explained that it took time and practice to embed children's use of spoken language to agree and disagree with each other. Pupils needed to understand the difference between argument and quarrel. She also explained the need to reinforce the importance of respectful body language, which was particularly relevant due to some children's cultural backgrounds. This is something echoed in another thinking skills programme referred to in the literature review. Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick (2007) talk of 'building a discourse culture that involves risk-taking and the explicit modelling and practice of particular talk moves' taking 'many months of concerted effort' (p.295) for students of widely varying backgrounds to begin to listen to each other. The use of words and phrases to demonstrate respect and show you are listening to each other, all contribute to a greater sense of classroom community. They are what is known as 'appreciative enquiry' in P4C and correspond to what Mercer (2000, p.97) describes as the development of 'exploratory and cumulative talk' rather than 'disputational talk'. They require a sense of trust and shared endeavour and only succeed with shared ground rules which take time to develop (Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif, 2000).

## 5.3 Relationships

How teachers enact curriculum through their pedagogy is dependent on the relationships they form with the pupils. From several classroom observations, reinforced by their own reflections and children's perceptions, I was able to build up a picture of two of the teachers, Amy and Rachel, whose lessons and pedagogy have formed part of the focus of the previous section.

### Amy

Amy had a close, informal relationship with her pupils and there was a relaxed atmosphere in class, even when discussing serious issues. Lessons flowed naturally, yet they were not without pace and there was a respectful, democratic relationship between the teacher and pupils. Children chose who to work with and where to work in the room. Amy herself could often be found in different parts of the class. She seemed to pop up unobtrusively, supporting groups or individuals, but she did not sound her presence. For an observer, it was not always easy at a glance to see where she was. Throughout her teaching, she displayed elements of her humility and humour as in the following exchanges. In the first one, Tyler challenges a sentence she has written on the board:

*Tyler: I am not sure this makes sense miss... 'stop humans from poaching and taking away that freedom...'*

*Amy: Thanks for putting me right...*

In the same lesson, she reflects on a silence that has developed in the classroom. Then a few moments later teases a child, Hazaneen, about her work:

*Amy: We have come to an automatic stop! [She then drops her voice to a much lower, quieter tone] I love it when that happens.*

...

*Amy: We could get carried away, Hazaneen [she jokes]. Don't repeat the whole essay!*

*Hazaneen: But Miss, we are using the rubric to check! [They laugh]*

Amy is committed to an approach which we have described as dialogic. Her ability to display fallibility is an 'epistemic virtue' which Habermas believes to be necessary, along with integrity, to engender trust in an ideal speech role situation (1984). Pupils follow her example. We see this exemplified when they challenge her, as seen below:

Amy: *The next theme is 'Dreams'*

...

Nafeesa: *Miss, I'd like to question you. By dreams, do you mean nightmares or wishes?*

Amy: *I think I meant dreams, not life goals.*

...

Zak: *Miss, when you say people, do you mean yourself or other people?*

She is also reflective of her own development as a teacher. When asked to characterise her teaching style, she believes that she encourages debate and has now,

*'...come to understand that the learning process is mutual, almost on a fifty-fifty basis, sometimes **taken more my way**, sometimes actually **taken more their way** in terms of what we get out of things' [her stress].*

But this has involved a significant change. She felt that she had a closed view before beginning to use P4C, but it and the children have taught her to be more open. The practice of P4C has allowed her to build better relationships with the children,

*'P4C has allowed me to build relationships that you know...makes them feel really comfortable about asking me any question'.*

She feels that the approach has led her to a better understanding of her pupils and that they therefore have a better quality learning experience,

*'I understand the children better and feel that this approach ... I feel as though we have connections that make their learning ... um, what's the word? They have a richer learning experience from it than me saying 'This is what Ancient China is... make a poster!'.*

## **Rachel**

My impressions of Rachel, made at the same time, were of a teacher who was caring, attentive, cajoling, committed to her class, but less confident. Her lessons had a tighter, more controlled feeling. There was pace and focus and pupils were engaged, but there appeared to be less flow in discussion between pupils and more was mediated by the teacher. Children did choose their own spaces to work at times following the school's espoused pedagogy, but more time was spent as a whole class. Rachel did not have the same unobtrusive presence and would often sound her whereabouts by an individual 'well done!' or other comment to a child with a louder voice which (even if subconsciously) seemed intended to give a message of

being 'in charge' to her pupils. It is not uncommon for teachers early in their career to have behaviour management high on their agenda and Rachel had only been teaching for three years at the time, in comparison to Amy's six. She may also have been self-conscious because of the observation. So, for example, when I observed her for the second time, she regulated how children entered the classroom from the playground, only letting in a group at a time and 'shushed' them as they came in. Her language - '*I am looking for people who are smart*' - was surprising for a teacher of a Year 6 class, better suited to younger children.

Yet despite this apparent greater social distance and more conventional power relationship observed in her lessons, Rachel stated that she feels closer to her class,

*'the bit that I really like is that you feel like quite almost like connected to your class [her vocal tone shifts and she sounds more passionate at this point] and I think they do **trust** you a lot with what they are saying. And P4C does bring that out in a way that other subjects don't really because it is like quite an intimate like safe conversation ...and you do see another side to the children'.*

She continued to explain how it allows her to express herself,

*'It allows you to be a bit more opinionated I'd say, whereas in some other subjects it has almost to be like 'cut and dried'. You can put your own almost more **human** opinion forward rather than just saying it as a teacher figure, you do become more someone with their likes and dislikes and you know "I believe this but that's ok if you don't"'*

In these statements, Rachel is reflecting on her feeling towards her pupils, but also it seems on her changing concept of what it means to be a teacher. The use of the word 'human' (and the accompanying stress) coupled with 'intimate' in the previous quotation, seems to show that at these times, in enquiries, she experiences a different, and closer, relationship with her pupils. The shift in vocal tone and use of the word 'trust' reinforces this impression. Freire saw a true liberating education as, 'the process of humanisation' (1970, p.60) where teacher and pupil reflect upon their world together in order to change it. Her final statement, '*I believe this, but that's OK if you don't*' merely serves to highlight the interpretation of her exchange with Imran, in the lesson on Terrorism. She seems to be developing a democratic attitude towards the children - her interpretation of '*the teacher figure*' enlarging to allow an approach where her voice does not always have to be the 'authoritative voice' (Maybin, 2006).

Children's views of how they experience teachers confirm feelings of greater closeness. Catherine's view, as stated earlier in the chapter is,

*'They just give like a bit more of like **our** way... than them always like telling us what we're supposed to be doing'.*

In the same focus group, Zephaniah makes a statement that seems to underline that teachers listen more to pupils when he states,

*'They also behave a bit different because in P4C they like let you express your feelings other than just in normal lessons they want you to listen because ...you need to like understand what they are saying'.*

## **Peer relationships**

If teachers experience their pupils differently, there is also evidence of pupils experiencing each other differently. Many of the lessons observed at St. Luke's demonstrate features of cooperative interaction (Howe, 2010), whether at whole class or small group level. The most prominent of these is the experience of differing perspectives. Through the concept-led curriculum and P4C lessons, pupils are afforded many opportunities to compare views. During a discussion of *Selflessness* for example, Zarek felt that poor people could not afford to give, but Caleb believed no matter what, you can always afford to be selfless. There are also examples of children not directly disagreeing, but expressing different shades of opinion, or moving a discussion forward by adding details. For example in Amy's lesson where children discussed the concept of control, when it came to the theme of dreams, one child expressed the view that God makes dreams. Another added that if you watch 'scary stuff' you are more likely to have nightmares, thereby opining that you may have some indirect control over your dreams.

Rachel believed that some children actively seek out those with different views to sit next to and to engage in debate,

*'... sometimes [they] almost choose to sit with different people or people they might not necessarily agree with or people that they maybe knowingly know they are going to have very different opinions. So, it's almost like they choose to want to have more discussion... than maybe they would necessarily on the playground'.*

Several pupils confirm this. Zephaniah likes hearing other voices. His choice of the verb 'intrigued' shows the curiosity such experiences are developing in him,

*'In P4C you don't have to like hear the teacher every single time, you get to... hear ...other people in your class and ... you're kind of like intrigued to hear what they think'.*

Another strong voice to emerge from two of the focus group interviews is that of Liam, a Year 6 boy. Liam is appreciative of the opportunity to listen to other children, rather than competing for the attention of the teacher,

*'It helps us talk to more of our class mates in a circle instead of us, the children, talking to the teacher. So, we are engaging with others more and we can see different points and how other people think'.*

He offers a mature reflection on how these opportunities have affected him and his view of others,

*'It's given me more understanding about the wider world and it's got rid of some of my assumptions about certain groups of people and it's made me share my opinion with other people that may have the same opinions'.*

These testimonies provide evidence that children are developing a deeper level of understanding of other viewpoints, and the layers of meaning in a given situation. Inherent in this approach is learning to regard others as autonomous agents, through developing empathy, integrity and an awareness of our own fallibility - as demonstrated by Amy's openness to children questioning her, or pointing out when they think she is wrong or has made a mistake. These features of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry, as found in P4C, are similar to Habermasian discourse, as noted in the literature review. It is characterised by a fallibilist view of knowledge, a commitment to intersubjective meaning making and to equality, respect and inclusion (Fletcher, 2016). Children are developing the experience of meaning making together and learning to appreciate and tolerate difference. This attempt to reach understanding resonates with Habermas's *Pragmatic Theory of Meaning* where speech functions to develop a, 'shared intersubjective consensus between interlocutors' (Finlayson, 2005, pp. 34-35).

The experience of contrasting perspectives is a feature of co-operative interaction (Howe, 2010). It is consistent with Piaget's view of cognitive growth arising from the coordination of existing beliefs with contrasting perspectives (1932, 1985), what is also termed 'sociocognitive conflict' (Doise and Mugny, 1984), 'transactive dialogue' (Berkowitz, Gibbs and Broughton, 1980) or 'exploratory talk' (Barnes and Todd, 1977; Mercer and Littleton, 2007). Positive associations between this approach and

test results have been demonstrated in successive studies of P4C (Topping and Trickey, 2007a; Gorard, Siddiqi and See, 2015). It may be, then, that discussions with peers at small group and whole class level are supporting children's cognitive development.

Another key feature of cooperative interaction is that described by Howe (2010) as 'Assistance'. This approach is asymmetrical, as opposed to the symmetrical form of cooperative mode in the exchange of views described above. Here one child helps another 'rehearsing information, restructuring material, filling gaps in knowledge and taking new perspectives' (Howe, 2010, p.85). It can consistently benefit the giver of assistance (Webb, 1989), but the child receiving the assistance is only seen to benefit if they make the assistance their own, rather than interact passively. The pupil Mia suggests not only that she recognises the strategy of how to help, and how much help to give, but that she has practised it,

*'I think you can be collaborative in other lessons too because if you are working in a partner and your partner is like stuck on a Maths question, you can use your collaborative skill and help your partner with the easy bits but not tell them the answer'.*

Another child, Bathsheba, suggests an understanding of how far this assistance can go, and that you should not be 'giving the answer',

*'If you are doing a 'Big Write' or something in Literacy, you can't be like, "No, that's not how you spell 'because'", you just have to say, "you've done a little mistake, so you need to edit just that part".'*

Both of these testimonies come from girls, which is also consistent with the literature in this area as discussed in the literature review (Conwell, Griffin and Algozzine, 1993; Lee, 1993) which finds that girls more actively ask for help than boys, but also end up being the ones that give more assistance.

## **Community**

A feature of the way children and teachers experience each other is the sense of community. Children feel that they spend more time listening to each other, understanding each other's points of view and expressing their own identities. The child focus group participants also identify P4C sessions as a 'leveller', maybe removing the sense of competition or *Performance mode* (Howe, 2010), with its accompanying individualising tendencies. The removal of the fear of 'getting the

answer wrong' resonates across a number of these testimonies, as seen in the exchanges below:

*Joe: I think like P4C's good cos you might not be good at other things but I think P4C's good to ... express yourself and ... show who you are...*

*Catherine: ... I think it's really different to other lessons because in P4C everyone can do it because everyone has their own thoughts about the question, but like, for example, if you're going to do Maths or Literacy ... many people might not understand it ... but in P4C everyone can understand it and you can put your own point in there.*

*Zephaniah: It's kind of different as well because P4C you get to, like, express your opinions but in other lessons you don't really get to do that as much.*

The sense of community seems to stretch beyond the confines of the classroom as evidenced in other studies on the personal, social and affective impact of P4C (e.g. Siddiqui, Gorard and See, 2017). Amy, for example, feels that the ability to reflect and accept responsibility for actions when things have gone wrong on the playground has improved as a result of P4C becoming embedded. This is echoed by Rachel, who identifies a developing empathy from an ability to see more than one side of an issue.

However, there are aspects of P4C that cause frustration. Children choose their classmates to speak, and it can lead to a situation where just a few children are perceived to dominate discussion and this can lead to resentment. Catherine states,

*'If I was to change anything about P4C it would be that .... You would ask everybody to share their thoughts and... and before changing the subject to say 'is everybody ready?' or if there's one more idea you should let them and if they have already spoken, not to let them'.*

This is a view shared by a younger girl, Molly,

*'The thing I don't like about P4C is when the teacher says you can choose the next speaker... is when it goes around the same people all the time. I feel there are many more people who can speak'.*

## 5.4 Risk

A final theme inherent in the enterprise the school has embarked upon is risk. Many of the themes discussed above entail an element of risk. At a very early stage in my interview with Jack, he identified the influences on his thinking, one of whom he cites as Biesta, a philosopher of education. Biesta identifies risk as a key and important element of lighting the fire, borrowing his metaphor from the poet Yeats. Risk is there because he sees students as subjects of action and responsibility, 'not objects to be moulded' (2013, p.1); the risk in education is that there is not a simple match between input and output, and,

The reason for this lies in the simple fact that if we take the risk out of education, there is a real chance that we take out education altogether (2013, p.1).

The risks in the approach taken at St. Luke's are potentially both to children and teachers. It requires skills not seen in 'traditional' lessons (Cazden, 2001). Knowing when to moderate children's choices in their learning and how to facilitate discussion, listening to pupils' voices, requires tact and a very good understanding of individual needs. Amy gives some insight into the challenges some less experienced colleagues face, with an example from practice of a teacher not having the confidence to go with the children's question, stating,

*'She needed to ask the pupils what they were thinking about...as soon as I asked them it was clear. It's clarity of what they wanted to discuss (that's important).'*

Teachers need to learn from reflection on their own experience. The fact that professional discussion is encouraged and time is devoted to this is useful, but philosophy lessons can be prone to circuitous discussions. This was the case in one of my observations, when Rachel taught a philosophy and mathematics class. Although I was not able to see the follow-up session, I felt that the initial discussion suffered from a focus that was too broad and so the enquiry did not make progress. The theme, 'Do numbers exist?' was fascinating but on several occasions Rachel became defensive, probably through lack of confidence with children's questions such as when she answered,

*'You'll have to find out more about it. The Scientists who have found this out have much bigger brains than me'.*

This had the effect of closing down the discussion.

A further risk in P4C lessons is that pupils who are not confident or not inclined to speak, do not get the opportunity to share their thoughts. Teachers have taken steps to mitigate this risk, for example the voting system employed by Amy in the lesson on *Control* where five possible choices were on offer, one of which did not involve talk or discussion. A 'silent enquiry' where children wrote down their views, to be read out by the teacher, which was used by Marc, was a further variation.

Two further possible risks apply. Rachel, who strongly believed that children had improved in their social interactions alluded to the fact that written work may have suffered as a consequence,

*'Even though, if you looked at some of the core books of the children that are coming up in an academic sense, they would maybe not be as high ability'*  
[reduces to almost a whisper].

Although it is hard to make a judgement, it would seem that her feelings, which she is keen to keep quietly expressed, probably because she feels a sense of allegiance to school, may be borne out by the school's SATs results, which have shown a downward trend in core subjects over the last three years. This is a clear illustration of the risks that such a 'counter-cultural' teaching approach can engender in a system where measurement is by results in tests that focus on a specific set of academic skills.

Amy, who has been teaching Year 6 for four years, mentioned that some children who pay visits back to school find adapting to secondary school difficult. This is because they are not given the same opportunities to express themselves or participate in discussions. The question of enfranchisement is significant. Will the experience of choice and agency in primary school make it hard to adapt to a secondary education that may not entail such opportunities? Will their political literacy which has been kindled lie dormant? Or will it empower them in ways that it may not be easy to envisage or account for? These questions will be discussed further in the final chapter as a possible focus for further research.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has explored how talk is used in the classrooms of one school in the context of a thinking skills approach to learning. The final chapter concludes with reflections on the research questions and a consideration of the contributions to knowledge and practice, with recommendations for further research.

### 6.1 Conclusions to research question 1

#### **How is talk used in the classroom in the context of a thinking skills approach to learning?**

Children at St. Luke's were learning to talk together to analyse their experiences. This approach was being fostered in the school by an enquiry-based curriculum built around significant social concepts relevant to their lives. P4C lessons provided the ground rules, procedures and verbal techniques to enable productive discussion, corresponding to the development of what Habermas termed 'communicative competence' (1984). These and other pedagogical approaches used to enact the curriculum, enabled children to be agentic in directing their own learning, building upon their own and others' experiences to develop their understanding.

The findings demonstrate that developing this disposition operates at both a social and cognitive level. Children's developing ability to analyse and evaluate some of their preconceptions and experiences was seen at times to resemble the dawning of an awareness compatible with Freire's ideas of developing critical consciousness (1974). The experience was building their understanding of the mutually constitutive relationship between individual and society (Wells, 1999). This emancipatory approach, summed up in the title of one of the Year 6 topics, *Should we accept our place in Society?* could be understood to be transformative. In the case of Imran, for example, in the discussion of Isis and the role of Abu Bakr-al Baghdadi (Chapter 5, figure 3), the child's extended dialogue with the teacher witnessed by his peers is an example of a discourse strategy which, by enabling one child to 'think aloud', both attributes value to talk, and develops the understanding of the group.

Another significant finding was children's development of concept vocabulary. By providing abstract nouns at an appropriate point in discussion, teachers empowered pupils to 'bring about their own development through their own self-transcending efforts' (Young, 1992, p.84). The testimony of the teachers that children were able to apply these words in new contexts (also evident in observation), shows something interesting happening. Teachers were enabling children to build a bridge between what Bernstein termed 'horizontal' or everyday language and the 'vertical', literary and discipline-specific language of school (2003). Pupils were, in fact, being empowered by teachers to use what Freire termed the 'dominant syntax' (1996), thereby gaining access to valued cultural capital which they might otherwise be excluded from. They were developing the ability to articulate understanding of their own lived realities in a new and powerful way. This empowerment or emancipation corresponds clearly to a democratic view of education as espoused by Dewey (1916) and Freire (1970).

However, there were risks too. Both children and teachers recognised the possible dominance of some in classroom discussions at the expense of others who were either not chosen to speak by their peers or, for reasons of confidence, did not participate. Although one teacher had adopted an approach to try to manage this latter situation by using what he termed a 'silent enquiry' where children wrote their responses to be read out and discussed later, some children in the focus groups still felt that there were times when they did not have the opportunity to speak, as discussed further below.

Comparisons with other thinking skills programmes reveal similarities at several levels. The importance of an agreed charter or protocol, the use of sentence starters to indicate agreement or disagreement, and techniques for building on each other's ideas are also evident in Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif's *Thinking Together* programme (2000) as well as *Accountable Talk* (2007). Findings of this latter programme suggest that children learn to hear each other out and agree and disagree with some levels of sophistication, as has been found in the current study. Indeed Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick's work finds that children who are socialised into communities of practice using *Accountable Talk* engage in 'respectful and grounded discussion' rather than 'noisy assertion or uncritical acceptance of the voice of authority' (2007, pp. 286). Their hopes chime with those of Amy when they

state that they feel that if students are socialised early and intensively into deliberative discourse norms, they may internalise them and carry them into the civic sphere. An interesting finding from this research, but one that was not investigated in the current study, was the extent to which the discourse norms adopted in a thinking skills programme, like theirs, were more easily assimilated by children from homes with high levels of Western education. Other children struggled more, particularly where such language was unfamiliar and even what they describe as 'in conflict with their home or community norms' (2007, p.293).

## **6.2 Conclusions to research question 2**

**What are the effects of this approach on teacher pedagogy; classroom relationships between pupils and between pupil(s) and teacher; and child agency?**

### **Teacher pedagogy**

The pedagogy required to enact the concept-led curriculum, runs counter to a prevailing culture in English primary education which in my professional experience often bears greater resemblance to Freire's banking concept (1970), with its focus on testing. Interpretations of the findings in this study reveal something different. Teachers facilitate discussion, often adopting what corresponds to Boyd and Markarian's description of a 'dialogic stance' (2011). They use techniques adopted from P4C to develop communities of enquiry, where the 'illocutionary force' enables children to build on each other's ideas with sincerity and without fear of being wrong. Consistent with much writing on dialogic teaching (Boyd and Rubin, 2002; Mercer and Littleton, 2007, Alexander, 2017), this is not manifested by privileging a particular form, such as open questions, as recommended by some authors (e.g. Nystrand 2006), although these are used. Rather, it is the function of the talk that is significant. The discussions help children to develop their ability to think and talk in elaborated ways, with teachers using questions to recap or encourage reason-giving and develop analysis. There is consistent evidence of dialogic features, such as talk which is cumulative (Mercer, 2000), reciprocal and supportive (Alexander 2017) and a teacher disposition to listen harder to try and make links between what the student

currently knows and what she is expecting her to learn (Boyd and Markarian, 2011; Alexander, 2017).

Teachers in the study had different degrees of experience and showed different levels of confidence and facility. Amy, for example, believed that the dialogic approach had allowed her to 'be herself', altering her assumptions and her epistemological stance from the view of the teacher as the infallible teller (based on her own life experience), to a more fallible co-enquirer with the children (Young, 1992). Rachel, in her more overt use of regulatory discourse to manage the children's behaviour in the classroom (Bernstein, 2003), appeared at an earlier point on this journey, still using the authoritative voice much of the time and demonstrating body language which seemed to me to be an attempt to assert her control. Yet, during an interview, her reflections demonstrated a changing understanding of what it can mean to be a teacher as she identified her 'humanisation' during the practice of enquiring with the children saying '*you can put your own, almost more **human** opinion forward rather than just saying it as a teacher figure*'. This statement seemed to amount to a recognition of the altering of the conventional power dynamic between pupils and teacher in the community of enquiry, as the teacher reveals her own essential human fallibility whilst in true dialogue. Both teachers, to different degrees, reflected the fact that to feel confident in facilitating a philosophical discussion amongst children requires a different approach from a traditional teaching situation, where the teacher's is the more authoritative voice (Maybin, 2006). Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick find, in their work on the thinking skills programme *Accountable Talk*, that discussion succeeds best where teachers have authority which is both 'institutionally derived and personally earned' (2007, p.295). This perhaps reinforces the findings of this study in respect of Amy particularly in her ability to joke with the children and display fallibility in a way that Rachel appears only to be beginning to do. Teachers' reflections on their own epistemological stance seem to be a commonplace in the use of thinking skills programmes, such as P4C, endorsing the findings of Splitter (2000a and 2000b) and Baker and Fisher (2016). From teachers' testimonies, it also seemed that there was a supportive culture of sharing ideas and experiences of enquiries amongst staff in the school, amounting to a community of practice to mirror that of the classroom.

## **Classroom relationships between pupils and between pupil(s) and teacher**

The 'dialogic stance' taken during lessons observed in this case study reveal that relationships lie at the very heart of the endeavour. For it is the form that relationships take that is crucial to the development of the community of enquiry. Where it works best, there is a difference in the dynamic, with the pupil becoming a more trusted and equal co-inquirer or 'subject' in relation to the teacher, compared with a traditional or didactic teaching relationship (Cazden, 2001), where the pupil is seen more as a pedagogic 'object' (Young, 1992). The nature of an enquiry situation, bearing greater resemblance as it does to a conversation, requires a move from strategic communication structures (Habermas, 1984) to more conversational ones to be authentic. The findings of this study reveal teachers and pupils do experience each other differently: the pupil Catherine states, '*they give us more of our way*' and teacher Rachel '*You feel like almost connected to your class... I think they do **trust** you a lot with what they are saying*'. This endorses Freire's view that truly dialogic education involves teachers and students both being 'subjects' as they unveil reality, coming to know it critically and recreating their knowledge as they do so (1970, p.51). The way that children come to know teachers differently at these times, demonstrating a more equal power and speech role balance, can help enable them to reason together in a more participative way to reach consensus as theorised as crucial for democracy by Habermas (1984). Of course, there is still an unequal distribution of power between the teacher and pupils as is inherent in this social situation, but it appears to be more porous. Of the two teachers most closely focussed on, Amy seems to have developed a 'closer' relationship with her pupils than Rachel who is more inclined to use overt strategies to manage behaviour. However, it is not possible to draw links between these observations and pupils' engagement in meaningful discussions. Firstly, Rachel seemed less confident when I observed her, which could have resulted in a tendency to try to control children's behaviour more. Secondly, as has been discussed, one of Rachel's observed lessons on Terrorism demonstrated a shift in stance during the lesson towards a more equal dialogue with a pupil.

Findings show evidence of relationships between pupils conforming to Howe's definition of co-operative interaction (2010). The more discursive learning situations enable pupils to share views with each other, rather than compete for teachers'

attention to answer their questions. In fact, they seem to develop their interest in learning about each other's beliefs. Two year 6 boys, Liam and Zephaniah, speak persuasively about how they have enjoyed experiencing different points of view. Liam confessing, *'It's got rid of some of my assumptions about certain groups of people'* and Zephaniah stating, *'You're kind of like intrigued to hear what they think'*. Teachers notice that at times children deliberately choose to sit with someone with different views, enabling them to have a discussion which would not be possible on the playground. Children also show each other assistance, something evidenced by the testimonies of two girls, where we maybe hear an echo of the teacher's voice when Mia says, *'You can use your cooperative skill and help your partner with the easy bits, but not tell them the answer'*. Levels of confidence in expressing their opinions were also notable in children across the age range in the focus groups.

### **Child agency**

The avowed intent of the education at St. Luke's, as explained by the deputy head teacher, Jack, is for the pupils to develop independence, creativity and knowledge (both procedural and propositional) through an enquiry-oriented curriculum. It has a focus on moral and philosophical concepts, which he considers to be of critical importance to the children of the community so that, *'the kids get to explore through lots of different perspectives'*. What he describes, and what is confirmed through some observed lessons, is close to what Freire called 'problem raising' (1970). For it to have meaning, and for pupils to be able to develop autonomous reasoning skills, however, this approach needs to be contextualised. Questions need to be raised which relate to children's own life experience. They also need to have the means to discuss them. Learning to reason in an absolute sense, by having examples given, but without the cut and thrust of really experiencing discussion and learning to justify your point of view, ignores the interpersonal aspect of argumentation. It is in this process, what Littleton and Mercer call 'interthinking' (2013) which is both social and emotional, that we see children begin to express their identities and evaluate their experiences in a critical way in lessons observed at St. Luke's. Sometimes the meaningful context is not immediately apparent, as in Amy's lesson on 'Control', but relies on the teacher to provide it, as she does with the discussion of the suicide of Molly Russell. In others, like Rachel's lesson on Terrorism, comparing Isis's actions with Islamic beliefs, or Amy's English lesson, where children develop an essay about

'taking their place in society', it is clear. However, there are failures too, as there must be where contextual realities or details of the interaction are factors. In Rachel's mathematics and philosophy lesson with the question 'Do numbers exist?', for example, the lesson was marred by a question that was probably too wide, children's lack of context and the teacher's lack of confidence which had the effect of closing down discussion.

During many of the lessons observed in years 5 and 6, however, children are engaged in learning to think by trying out their understanding and receiving teacher responses that are not evaluative, as in a traditional IRF situation, but affirmative. The teachers are not insistent on children using the correct term as an 'entrance fee to knowledge' (Barnes, 1987 p.129), but enable them to develop the 'dominant syntax'. They give status to children's own ways of explaining things, but also provide useful vocabulary to enable them to reframe their thoughts. In this way, they develop their own agency. As they share and compare views, pupils begin to become critically aware. However, although this approach, developing oral confidence and competence, will work for some children, it will not work for all. One of the issues not explored in this study, but seen in Marc's class enquiry on *Selflessness*, is what happens for those children who do not participate in discussions, for whatever reason. These children may have developed the linguistic competence to understand fully what is going on during class discussions, but may not choose to participate. Alternatively, they may not have adequate levels of understanding to participate. Marc's strategy of a so-called 'silent enquiry' initiated as a result of children's suggestions, aims to empower those who did not feel confident to discuss or feedback their views in a class discussion. Pupils in this lesson were encouraged to write down their ideas for the teacher or peer to express for them. This area, and what inclusive strategies teachers adopt for those who may not be able to participate, would merit further investigation.

There are other ways pupils are supported to develop independence, and thereby agency, in their education at St. Luke's. The lack of classroom desks or tables, and teachers not arranging pupils in groups according to their perceived ability, provides what Jack describes as 'environmental independence', and is seen in action throughout lessons observed. Children can choose to work alone or with others of

their choice. They are free to move around the classroom without seeking teacher permission. They can also choose what piece of work to pursue.

There are potential risks, however, of this growing agency, not investigated in this study, which would benefit from further research. Children who have moved on to secondary schools have been known to return and explain how they have found adapting difficult, as they do not have the same opportunities to express themselves or participate in discussions and decision making. The enfranchisement and development of autonomy through experiences in primary school may prove to be problematic or empowering for the child at secondary school, in home life or because of religious or cultural expectations.

### **6.3 Conclusions to research question 3**

#### **What are the implications of these findings for the professional development of teachers?**

The findings of this study point to a different conceptualisation of primary education, amounting to what I describe as 'counter-cultural' as in my professional experience what I saw at St. Luke's contrasts with much current practice. The case has illuminated my understanding of curriculum, pedagogy and relationships. It has led me to make the following recommendations for practice.

#### **Talk in the curriculum**

St. Luke's has planned an enquiry-based approach to curriculum using P4C where talk plays a major role. Topics titles are framed as questions and lessons provide opportunities for children to examine their experiences and assumptions and develop a greater sense of individual agency. They listen to each other, build on each other's and the teacher's ideas and challenge each other and the teacher respectfully using the language of reasoning. Teachers empower children by providing concept vocabulary at the right point in discussion giving access to valued knowledge and a culturally accepted means of communication. Children use these words to frame their reasoning in future conversations or discussions. This has come about as a result of a deep sense of commitment to the idea of education as a moral enterprise,

as the deputy head teacher, Jack, explains when he talks about '*the purpose of education*', '*the stuff that really matters*'. Developing this approach has not been quick or easy and the school has redesigned their curriculum several times. Nor does it seem that there is a naïve belief that all learning can come about through engagement of this sort and there is no place for direct instruction. Indeed, in several observations (a mathematics lesson in a year 2 class and an English lesson in a year 6 class) I saw direct instruction and modelling.

The implications I draw from this are that schools and teachers should re-examine their curriculums, considering whether they represent the values and aspirations they have for the children in their care and adapt them as they see fit. Teachers and student teachers should consider developing children's linguistic competence through providing opportunities to engage in discussion and enquiry where the language of reasoning is used. A bridge should be built between everyday and school language, concrete and abstract terms. The process may take time and thought and is not without risk, but the opportunities for children to become engaged, respectful and confident members of the community reflect placing serious value in education as the means of emancipation (Freire, 1970) alongside the development of subject specific knowledge and skills. Indeed, in the context of current concerns over curriculum narrowing, as raised by Ofsted (2019), and wider societal concerns about levels of childhood anxiety, exacerbated by the global pandemic, a more holistic approach which integrates development of children's agency, voice and confidence through adaptations to curriculum and pedagogy, may be preferable to a discrete approach which favours 'bolt-ons' such as lessons in *Mindfulness*. As demonstrated in the case study school, the adoption of an enquiry model to aspects of the curriculum need not be at odds with the requirements of the National Curriculum.

## **Relationships**

Both teachers whose practice is focussed on closely in this study identify the nature of their relationships with their pupils as being significant for successful P4C enquiries. Amy explains that P4C has allowed her to '*understand the children better*' creating '*connections that make their learning... richer*' by encouraging debate. This differs from her own original teacher identity as someone employed to '*deliver the*

*goods*'. She reflects too that *'P4C has allowed me to build relationships that...makes them feel really comfortable about asking me questions'*. Rachel feels that P4C allows her to feel *'more connected to her class'* and to put her own *'almost human opinion forward, rather than just saying it as a teacher figure'*. Both reflect concern for those in whose interests they are acting, and both stress the importance of connectedness and openness in relationships with pupils. Amy's style and professional persona corresponds to Boyd and Markarian's definition of 'dialogic stance' (2011). She is consistently open with the children. She believes P4C has warranted her use of humour (*'I am very sarcastic and I think that the children get that'*) and openness to criticism or fallibility in discussion with them. Rachel often still demonstrates the authoritative stance identified by Maybin (2006), but she shows her ability to change and appreciates the benefits of this in her relationships with the children, using words like trust and humanity as measures of this change. In my experience as a teacher educator I am often frustrated by an over-focus on seeing a teacher as the sum of her parts – skills, knowledge and competencies. A similar approach can be seen in the classroom when teachers 'measure' children's success by their learning outcomes. This is perhaps not surprising as we are accountable for our students meeting the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2011a) and Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (DfE 2019b). It is merely a symptom of a wider hegemonic discourse (Jones, 2006), as discussed in Chapter 2. However, it means what I regard as the core of what it means to be a good teacher - the formation and transformation (Biesta, 2013, p.135) - is often overlooked.

The implications I draw from this for both initial teacher education and continuing professional development suggest a need to focus on placing classroom relationships at the core of teaching by developing an openness in the way talk is used with pupils. This research demonstrates that the reduction of the social distance (Wells, 1999) and a fallibilist stance by the teacher in a community of enquiry is key to success in this endeavour. This is enabled by openness in body language, something which can be encouraged and developed in young teachers, as can tone of voice. It also requires the teacher to make herself more accessible by, for example, being seen to be wrong, being open to children questioning her and engaging in dialogue 'as an equal'. Of key importance is the ability to listen to children. There are significant social benefits to both children and teachers in these

talk situations from children being able to '*have a go without being afraid of getting it wrong*' and '*take it more our way*', to quote from child participants in this study. Removing the need to compete for teacher attention and providing an opportunity to listen to each other's views and opinions is beneficial in building a sense of community, developing child agency and reducing behavioural incidents. However, developing this approach also carries significant risks. Many teachers who are new to the profession or lack confidence, like Rachel, will be nervous about opening themselves up to pupils. They will also be worried about the possible negative implications for children's behaviour. The teachers in this study explained how it had taken much time and effort to coach children to use appropriate verbal and body language to engage in meaningful enquiries, a finding also confirmed in Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick's study of *Accountable Talk* where it took 'many months of concerted effort' (2007, p.295). Teachers adopting this approach will have lessons which are not successful, maybe 'going around in circles' or failing to be able to facilitate a discussion well, as Rachel did in her mathematics lesson, and as Amy reflects in her role as P4C co-ordinator. Children may close down or feel vulnerable to ridicule by peers.

### **Developing practical wisdom – 'praxis'**

Engaging in classroom enquiries with children can be a tricky business. Planning does not lend itself to the commonplace approach of using learning objectives and success criteria, although I have seen these used (for example in Amy's lesson on *Taking Your Place in Society*). Enquiries do require planning and forethought, of course, and coaching children not only to learn how to interact with each other, listening, appreciating and building on each other's statements, but also in their body language and tone of voice – making eye contact, framing their opinions even when in disagreement in a reasonable tone. But it also requires practical decision-making in the moment from the teacher, a skill which, drawing on the work of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, is described by some as a 'virtue' (Biesta, 2013). Following Smith (2008, p.65) I have used the word 'praxis', to identify this 'acting wisely and carefully in a particular situation'.

Two significant demonstrations of praxis are identified in the section on classroom interactions, where Amy decides to return the discussion to the issue of suicide and

where Rachel engages in a dialogue with Imran who concludes that Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi is 'disrespecting God'. On each occasion the teachers make a wise decision, but one that is neither easy nor obvious. Amy decided to discuss the issue of suicide because of recent coverage of the death of the teenager Molly Russell. She was aware of the sensitivity and possible parental fallout, but was driven by her sense of moral responsibility - the importance of the children being able to discuss what she describes as '*concepts that are difficult and... in other areas of learning and other approaches they would be untouchable*'. In the case of Rachel's dialogue with Imran, it is not as clear whether her practical action is deliberate or instinctive. She could have closed down the discussion. She could have taken a more authoritative stance and suggested Imran discuss the matter with his parents or Imam, or said she did not know enough to agree or disagree. But she does not make it personal. Her comments neither reinforce the passion with which he expresses himself, nor negate it. She acts merely as a foil for his reasoning, enabling him to proceed to draw a conclusion both by what she says and does not say. This enables the other children to develop their own understanding by witnessing the dialogue.

The lessons for practice from these examples are nuanced. They arise from a consideration of when practice become praxis - decisions made when the teacher is showing a commitment to acting truly and justly (Smith, 2008, p.66). This applies to the school decision to construct their curriculum according to what they believe are the best interests of the school and community. It also is exemplified in these two incidents in individual lessons. For teachers and student teachers it entails pursuing what they believe is right in their individual classes and with their individual students and living with the consequences of their actions. Of course this can present a dilemma, confronting the teacher with what Williams, Gumtau and Karousou, term 'the conflict between instrumental and ontological reflection' (2008, p.22), as referred to in chapter 1. However, with experience and by opportunities to take risks in teaching they will grow more confident in their praxis. And, if we did not take these risks, as Biesta (2013) contends, we may as well regard education as technology, where there is a perfect match between input and output, and where children are objects to be moulded, not subjects of action and responsibility.

## **6.4 Limitations of the study**

Whilst I have confidence in the methodology and research instruments and in the conclusions I have drawn, I recognise that there are limitations to this study. I have tried to minimise the potential limitations through my research design, or have discussed the necessarily interpretive nature of the study so as to 'warrant' my conclusions. As a case study of a particular phenomenon, I recognise that the findings are neither generalisable nor transferable to any other situation with validity. The strength of the study lies in what Stake regarded as the key epistemological question driving a case study, 'what can be learned from the single case?' (2003, p.135). Although he stressed that this did not refer to generalisability, I have drawn recommendations from the study in the light of some of the findings.

A key limitation of the study could be seen as the fact that the observations were drawn from the practice of only four teachers working over a limited period of time with six classes of children. In addition, whereas the three focus groups drew children from across the age range (year two to year six), the observations were limited to years five and six, with one observation in year two. This, along with the fact that, as researcher, I was reliant on my school contact to set up the observations and interviews, means that the findings cannot seek to represent the school, merely what was found in the classes observed and the teachers interviewed.

A further limitation was the outbreak of the world pandemic, Covid 19. This medical emergency brought my fieldwork to an abrupt standstill and potentially limited the data set which this thesis draws upon. Had the pandemic not struck, I might have been able to widen the observations, thereby deepening the findings to some degree. However, as I was initially only intending to make one more visit, in summer 2020, this is speculation.

## **6.5 Contribution to Knowledge**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), it is important to appraise whether a piece of qualitative research can make a claim to producing new knowledge. The

illumination of the case studied in this thesis has contributed to an understanding of what primary education can look like, and how it can be practised, both in terms of curriculum design and pedagogy. A valuable contribution is the significant argument that an enquiry-oriented curriculum, matched with a dialogic stance to pedagogy where there are regular discussions and children develop the language of reasoning, can be emancipatory, developing children's agency. It can be consciousness-raising, enabling children to question why things are like they are, especially when, as in this case, links are made to their life experience and knowledge, and their own cultural capital. This contribution may also apply in other phases of the education sector.

## **6.6 Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for further research**

Several issues from this study, I believe, would be worthy of further research. The planning of a 'concept-based' curriculum by the case study school to use alongside P4C is an innovation. It would be interesting to be able to investigate the degree to which other schools using the P4C programme have adapted their curriculum and what the implications for pedagogy have been. I would particularly be interested in finding out how and whether this had affected classroom relationships and whether concept vocabulary was used in cross-curricular study.

A second issue, associated with the potential risks arising from the adoption of this emancipatory approach to learning, would be to what extent pupils find the agency and criticality they have developed an encumbrance or a benefit in their continuing education in the light of the instrumentalist nature of current education policy as discussed in chapter 2.

Finally, it would be interesting to be able to investigate to what extent the discourse norms of P4C are differentially assimilated depending on children's cultural and ethnic background and gender. This has been found to be an issue in studies on *Accountable Talk* (Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick, 2007).

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Example out-takes from transcripts of interviews, lesson observations and focus groups.

**A: Interview with Teachers, Rachel (Year 6) and Marc (Year 5), 9<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

**I: What do you consider to be the value of P4C for the children and to you?**

R: I think it has enormous value. We have really seen the benefits in terms of how the children are able to articulate themselves. We have quite a diverse school and I think it just enables them to see how much of a community they are and see the differences but also see what unites them really. And I think a lot of the things we do in P4C talk about community and the advantages of being a good community.

M: Yer and all the empathy and everything that you sort of promote, putting yourself, sort of thinking about things from other points of view and the wider world knowledge that they get from it as well..

R: Misconceptions from that as well and addressing that. Like in some of the work we do... a lot of our children are talked to sometimes in quite an adult manner at home or might, you know, have things talked to them about the news or they might see lots of things on social media and addressing those misconceptions is really important I think because they do have a lot of kind of emotional baggage about things almost from what they read and what they hear...

M: Yes and things that they can access and then develop a point of view from and then, yes, like you said, challenging it and making sure they have a safe environment to bring up any questions and not... (Pause) sort of, you don't really shy away from anything in P4C

R: Yer, everything can be talked about... but I think it's quite nice

M: Yes and the children know that and they are happy to bring up things they might find difficult talking to other people about where they can talk about it among their peers and get their points of view on things as well

**I: I was interested in the innovation in your class today which was a kind of silent version so picking up on the fact that some may not have the confidence to speak**

M: Yer, we did it right at the start of the year and to be honest they voted to do the silent enquiry this time so... there is a lot of review happens in the P4C process as well so they think about whether they could have answered that question better or whether their input could have focussed more on one of the skills or and we review that at the end and then they sort of decide how they record their thoughts, how they record their 'final thoughts' um how they would like the enquiry to go. And they kept

saying they would like to do a silent enquiry and then last time we were talking about 'final thoughts' and they said could we do a silent enquiry next time, because the first time we did it they had never done one before so we have done two or maybe three this year and um they found it really useful because the people that didn't usually contribute felt confident enough to go up and write down, even if it's only one word or a concept or something and contribute.

**I: SO do you (not heard) ... people up on that, do you say 'so this is so and so's contribution'**

M: Today?

**I: Well, whenever, do you then...**

M: Well, we sort of look at it and then say... we sort of assess it against the criteria of the skills so they said today that lots of them had contributed... and before will have done the same thing. They said how they had contributed but they realised that they had not connected many points together. There were lots of new points. They thought about the skill we were looking at, which was a collaborative one and then they were talking about, because they are fully aware that they know they need to work on that, so they generally pick the skill they want to work on in different parts of our P4C and they know they are not great at building on each other's thoughts because everybody wants to – there are some quite big personalities in that class – and everybody wants to...

**I: Yes, everybody wants to put across their own**

M: Or they sort of get fixed on a point so they are trying to develop at the minute that way of looking at someone else's point, looking at person A's point, person B's, person C's, and trying to generate their own idea and we've been working on that for quite some time, but hopefully then, next year they will have got some base to build on and hopefully be able to go on it, but yer, the silent enquiry was purely because they felt more confident in contributing and people who usually wouldn't say something had the chance to write something down and they liked the fact they didn't have to remember what had been said, they could look and then they could build on things. It was there in front of them, so instead of remembering who said that and which point had come from where and then losing their train of thought trying to remember that they could just look at a point, read it and respond to it.

**I: That's interesting. I wonder if that's one of the features of visual aids as well...**

M: Hmm, yes...

**I: What about to you as teachers, this approach... Do you see any changes in yourselves? What is the value of it to you?**

R: Yes, so when I first started teaching we did do P4C but definitely not in the same way (I've been here three years). It wasn't as embedded and I don't think we shared as many things within the teaching staff and I think we are quite good at doing that.

M: Yes..

R: We almost like guinea pig a lot of ideas and then feedback on it. And I think... the bit that I really like is that you feel like quite almost like connected to your class (her vocal tone shifts and she sounds more passionate at this point) and I think they do **trust** (said slowly and with emphasis, not louder) you a lot with what they are saying. And P4C does bring that out in a way that other subjects don't really, because it is like quite an intimate like safe conversations so I think that's quite nice and you do see another side to the children and, like you say, if your like trying lots of different approaches like a visual one or one where you are trying to move around a lot to record your thoughts..

**I: Um but is it because, I don't want to put words into your mouth, but is it because you are sharing thins with them that you wouldn't in other teaching situations be talking about (some talkover here with both interviewees agreeing)**

R: Yes, I think so... and it allows you to be a little bit more opinionated I'd say, whereas in some other subjects it almost has to be like 'cut and dried' you can put your own almost like more **human** opinion forward rather than just saying it as a teacher figure, you do become more someone with their likes and dislikes and you know, 'I agree this but that's ok if you don't'

**I: And yet you were quite skilled in my observation this morning in terms of stepping a fine line between when someone said 'well some people might think that, you know, a member of Isis was 'abusing Islam' or something and rather than saying 'yes, that's right' you actually were very careful and said, 'yes, they *might* (spoken with emphasis) think that.'**

R: Yes... um

**I: So you are not interfering personally you are managing the discussion which is... (overlap)**

R: Which is quite a fine line... I think

**I: It's a skill**

R: In think, but that's quite nice to do I think and to show that there's actually quite a wide spectrum of different opinions and there will be within your class... I have quite a wide spectrum of opinions...

**I: Do you enjoy using P4C?**

R: Yer, yer I really do.

**I: It's brought you closer to children in some way?**

R: Yer, I think so

M: And I think especially being an NQT this year, so I did my training last year for most of the year, it is integral (spoken with emphasis) now to everything, isn't it?

R: Yer

M: It goes through our projects, we talk about concepts, and you can link all that learning and that makes it incredibly valuable, but like a really good anchor point for like all the children

R: Yer, they refer back to it a lot. I often find if they are doing something in projects, they will remember something in P4C a lot better

M: And they use the language, they use the...

R: Within everything... They'll say like 'I'm linking' or 'I am just going to build on that point' and that's throughout all the subjects

**I: I noticed that being quite evident in your lessons today. So one thing that interests me and I want to dig to the bottom of (but that might come in a minute) is this interconnection *between* (emphasis) P4C and the curriculum and *how* (emphasis) it is taught and you both have used the word 'embedded' and you both have referred to how actually children use the skills in their articulation... um so how do you get them to be more articulate?**

M: Do more P4C!

R: Laughs... Yes, I think that's a lot of it! Um. It is a lot of practice. To be honest I think children are definitely better at it now and children that have come up from Year 1 have really good strong skills..

**I: SO you are noticing a difference in the last few years?**

R: Massively, yer, Even *though* (emphasis) if you looked at some of the core books of the children that are coming up in an academic sense they would maybe not be as high ability (reduces to almost a whisper) but socially I think in terms of how they talk in P4C I'd say they are very strong. And I definitely think that comes through practice and again I might try with lots of different ways and approaches of doing an enquiry to see kind of what fits your particular group of children. So I think depending on which classes I've had, I've definitely changed my practice within P4C to suit whether they are a bit of a louder class and they do enjoy talking or whether... I have had classes where I actually they've been very quiet and much more happy to listen rather than to be vocal...

**I: Is it.... Is it about talking, P4C?**

R: Maybe not (sounds surprised... laughs nervously). Maybe not, maybe not really because we talk a lot about active listening and for me as a facilitator I would much rather have an active listener than have someone saying a point that is not really worth it and maybe just repeating what someone has already said and I think the children are aware of that and it is definitely something that we work on and yer, their response could be like through Art, it might be a bit of poetry. It doesn't necessarily have to be through talking

**I: yes, I've seen a range in some of Amy's lessons. Um... what about so... Talking about them being more articulate, and that maybe to do with confidence, it may be to do with developing just skills, social skills... 'building**

**on what so and so has said', those kind of little phrases, but what about ... do you develop their vocabulary as well?**

R: I think so and I think that links with how well we have embedded it within the projects as well. There's um, for example, we talked about... my class did the Titanic for their first project in Autumn and we talked about 'bias' and probably I'd say they had very rarely used that word, 'bias' in any other context apart from P4C. Like they used it today ... and really that's not something that's prompted, I'm not kind of forcing that into the conversation, but they are naturally bringing up concepts that they link with other things and obviously that's quite a different context with Isis to the Titanic so they are making really good links, I think and I think that does really help, and I think if you've explained something within P4C I think that sticks a bit more.

Marc re-enters room

**I: So, while you were out we were talking about how they become more articulate, we were talking about, I said to Rachel, 'is it about talking?' and she said it's also about active listening.**

M: Yer, listening as well, definitely

**I: I suppose in a minute we can talk about how you develop that ability to listen, but then again we came back to this 'embedding' and do you develop vocabulary then as well and you gave an example of the word 'bias' and how it had crept in because of work you had done in what was it. ?**

R: In History it was, in work on the Titanic and I just think they can apply it a lot better I think, and more accurately I think. There are a lot less instances where they're using complex words for the sake of it which really happened at the beginning when we started doing P4C. They would just kind of throw around...

**I: They were trying them out?**

R: Yer (overlap)

M: 'Hypocrisy'. Hypocrisy comes up all the time and they've got a far better understanding even just this year just from making sure it's being used in the correct...clarifying when words. I think we had to clarify one this morning... adversity. We talked about...

**I: You did (overlap)**

M: In our last project when we talked about refugees and things and we used the word adversity and I think we had it up on a 'word wall' so I'd put it in but then I asked them if they wanted anything clarifying in the question, but then in the exercise we did in the warm up they asked 'adversity. I can't remember what adversity means' and that's definitely one of those concepts or themes that comes up in P4C a lot so those bigger more difficult, sort of more grown-up ideas do come out and then we talk about them, then you clarify different bits within them, then it becomes sort of part of what they will start using around school, they can talk to each other about it..

R: Yer, and I think it's like being able to... having almost like the confidence to clarify things or give examples like real life things that you've had where it fits with those words and things so it makes a bit more like a connection to them

M: Oh yer...

R: And we do like a lot of the time get out the dictionary and we'll be like 'oh, actually I am not even sure what that means, let's take a look...'

**I: Good, yer give them an example**

M: Or if they've got confused over the meaning or something... there have definitely been times where they've thought of concepts and we've unpicked why they've thought of that and if they are using it in the right way and checking its meaning in the dictionary ... um

**I: So, were both the lessons I saw P4C lessons?**

M: Yes

R: Yes

M: Do you mean like just P4C?

**I Well, that's ...that's again** (lots of laughter)

R; Um hum (agreement)

M: It was under the umbrella of P4C

R: Um... I mean mine definitely is not to do with our project per se.. It was like a standalone 'Understanding Extremism' project but they have then used that and brought that into lots of other things throughout the year.

M: In mine they we've just done our piece of literacy on 'Alice in Wonderland' because our overarching project is about beliefs and perspectives and we're looking at all sorts of different things and we've looked at a couple of surrealist artists in our art project work and they are sort of pulling the surrealism from art in the Literacy, Alice in Wonderland so the stimulus for that lesson you saw today was 'The Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carrol.

**[SECTION MISSING]**

## **B: Narrative Observation, P4C: 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019, 10.50**

**Class: Year 6 (10-11 years), 30 Children**

Children: mixed ethnic heritage and religion (Black, Pakistani Moslem and White)

\*All names are pseudonyms.

### Context

I entered the room at 10.50 and class was already seated on the floor in semi-circle/horse shoe. I was welcomed by the teacher who sat at the same level as the children, but slightly to one side. The room was not laid out like a conventional classroom with clusters of tables and chairs arranged together. It had a number of sofas at different sides of the room, a full height table and some chairs, a white board and a number of smaller low level 'coffee' tables around and in front of the sofas. There was also a raised area which had been themed as 'The Titanic' where some children chose to sit and lie at a later point in the lesson. This area was currently between themes. There were other artefacts on display, notably a mannequin (full height tailor's dummy). A chair had been placed behind the horse shoe of children for my observation, but I instead chose to sit at a sofa with a table for me to spread out my stuff on, however at various later points during the lesson I did circulate to be able to see more closely what the children were doing and towards the end talk to them. I also spoke to the teacher on a couple of occasions for short periods during the latter parts of the lesson.

### Intro

Time: 10:50

After welcoming me the teacher informed me that the children are about to discuss '**The Concept of Control**'. There is a 'concept line' on the carpet in the middle of where the children are sitting in a horseshoe. It stretches from the Statement 'No Control' at the top, through 'some control' in the middle to 'Full control' at the other end. During stages of the lesson the children would place items for consideration such as 'Weather', 'Friends' and 'Food' at different points on the line (Weather, for example was placed midway between some control and no control, friends just below some control) but only after they had discussed them and some consensus had been reached.

*Note: Throughout the following the text will at times be a transcript of what child(ren) or teacher said where the observer was able to note this down. This is only part of what was said. On many occasions it was not possible for the observer to note down all of what was said.*

CHILDREN ARE SITTING IN ENQUIRY CIRCLE

Time: 10:50

**Teacher:** So the first theme is 'Weather'

Jonathan: ... so I think we have some control

Bathsheba: I agree with Jon. We do have some control. Global warming changes weather and we have caused it

Lauren: I agree with Jon and Bath. We can decide what weather we have because....

DURING THIS PART OF THE LESSON CHILDREN HAVE CHOSEN EACH OTHER TO SPEAK BY PUTTING THEIR HANDS OUT, A CONVENTIONAL MOVE IN P4C. BUT THEY CHOSE EACH OTHER. THE TEACHER DID NOT CHOOSE THEM

William: Sometimes you can make false weather.

**Teacher:** What do you mean by that?

...

Sarfraz: I would like to raise a question...

**Teacher:** What is your question?

Time: 10: 55

**Teacher:** The next theme is 'Friends we meet'. Talk to your partners!

THERE IS A DISCUSSION WHERE CHILDREN TALK TO THE PERSON NEXT TO THEM.

...

**Teacher:** Hands up when you are ready!

Samira: I think we do have some control because...

Gary: I think we have some. Like Samira said if we choose...

Harpreet: I also think we have some control because if...

Time :10:58

**Teacher:** The next theme is 'The food we eat'

Jerome: I think we have some control, but sometimes we might get forced.

Liam: I agree with Jerome but I also wanted to say that poor people don't have much control.

Mary: If you are in prison you cannot decide.

**Teacher:** Nice loud voice!

Hajra: I agree with Liam, if you are poor you do not have as much control, but I also agree with Mary too because...

Mohammed: If you are a child, you might eat what you are given, because your parents have decided...

**Teacher:** So do we see a theme coming through here?

James: Yes, CHOICE!

*There follows a brief discussion about this*

Time: 11:01

**Teacher:** The next theme is 'Death'

The teacher chooses the first child to express an opinion

Aneesa: You have some control if you are sick and don't take your medicine because then you might die. Or you might be in a car accident and be really badly hurt and die

**Teacher:** So what control would you have then?

Aneesa: None

Tyler: You can make choices – like whether you wear a seatbelt

**Teacher:** Are there always things that are preventable?

Liam: It might not be preventable if you decide to kill yourself

Joelle: I agree. You could decide to kill yourself

Kiran: If you just got a disease and died it would not be your fault.

**Teacher:** If you chose to take your own life, would it be wholly your choice if you had heard something about it?

*There is a brief discussion but the teacher moves it on quite soon to the next theme*

Time: 11.04

**Teacher:** The next theme is 'Dreams'

Hazaneen: I do not think we have any control because God makes dreams.

Jack: What type of dreams are we talking about... nightmares?

Ben: You could choose to watch some scary stuff.

Nafeesa: Miss, I'd like to question you. By dreams do you mean nightmares or wishes?

**Teacher:** I think I meant dreams, not life goals.

*There is some further dialogue*

**Teacher:** The next theme is 'People's reactions'

Hazaneen: I think it depends on what you say to a person.

William: I think we should put it on the scale between some and no control.

Joelle: But you can control your reaction to other people.

Zak: (Asking the teacher) Miss, when you say people, do you mean yourself or other people

Jonathan: I think people may react to what you look like, for example if you have rainbow hair.

...

Karanpreet: I think you do and you don't have control. For example, if somebody lies to other people, they might get a strong reaction.

Joseph: I think it should.

Abdul: I agree with that position.

*The use of language above is notable.*

Time: 11.10

At this point the children are asked by the teacher to break from the enquiry circle into groups. She hands out pieces of card with three further 'themes' on: 'traffic', 'health' and 'behaviour'

CHILDREN WORK IN ENQUIRY GROUPS SPREAD OUT IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE ROOM.

DURING THIS TIME THE TEACHER CIRCULATES, LISTENING, GETTING INVOLVED WITH QUESTIONS OR LISTENS

1. Traffic – group not heard/observed by researcher
2. Thoughts - group not heard/observed by researcher
3. Health – this is a dynamic discussion. One child leads, but there is conversation between another two while he is leading others. At one point the teacher enters the conversation and prompts (not heard)
4. Behaviour – this group work together co-operatively. They use the technique of putting hands out (as in a class enquiry) to offer their contributions. One person speaks at a time. 'It depends on your circumstance... if someone chooses to behave badly.... (a fragment of the discussion)

Time: 11.15

**Teacher:** (claps to gain class attention) We will come around the enquiry circle. Children all return to the carpet and take their places in the circle.

They feed back:

Jonathan: We put ours (Health) in the middle because

Miriam: We put ours (Thoughts) in between 'full' and 'no control' because someone else might introduce an idea into your head ... so someone else makes you think something...

**Teacher:** So, are you talking about the concept of 'influence' (Teacher introduces vocabulary to develop discussion)

Catherine: Ours was 'Behaviour'. We said some people might have problems like mental health – they don't get to choose!

Joelle: I think behaviour and reaction link...

**[SECTION MISSING]**

Lesson ends 12.00

## C: Focus group interview 1, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019

The group of 6 children range in ages from 6 to 11 (Year 2 to Year 6). Active parental consent has been granted in all cases.

The focus group interview was conducted with a member of staff present, Amy, year 6 class teacher and P4C co-ordinator

*Children choose each other to speak throughout by putting a hand out, as in P4C lessons.*

R: So... um. Thank you everybody. I have a group here from St. Luke's school. Thank you for coming to talk to me about your Philosophy for Children lessons. I just want to say first of all you are all happy to talk to me, aren't you? (pause)

Children: (Nods and murmurs of assent)

R: all right... yep. OK... and you can, if you choose, at any stage, not to answer or to stop talking or whatever and not to continue in it, that's up to you ... to choose, to decide that. All right. OK. So, first of all, I want to ask you a little bit about your Philosophy lessons and I want you to tell me **'How often do you have Philosophy lessons?'**

Mia: Usually, er our class we usually do it once a week because this week we're doing it after play time...Vernon?

Vernon: Our class does it twice a week. We start a concept... we think about a concept and after... with that concept we go to enquiry.

R: OK

Zak: Well, we like have them... it depends what our teacher thinks like, we sometimes have it in a day and that's what we do, we sometimes have it once a week or more...

R: So it could last, it could be as long as a day.. or part of a day?

Zak: and then sometimes /...(Talkover) there's this day of the year called P4C day.

R: Ok. Sounds good...

Zak: Bathsheba...

Bathsheba: In our class we do all... most of the time, not like all the time, we just do it sometimes...

**[SECTION MISSING]**

R: That's great. Thank you. Can you tell me... so next question is **'What do you like about P4C lessons? yer?**

Bathsheba: I like about P4C lessons that we get our brains to think in during P4C and think about different 'first thoughts'.

R: Brilliant! Thank you

Bathsheba: Uh... Jeffrey?

Jeffrey: Um I like about P4C that we have... we can choose our own... we can choose a question that we like and you can... your 'first thoughts' can be like anything that links with it so... Yer, that's what I like.

R: So it's quite interesting that you said 'we can choose our own'...

Jeffrey: Well you can choose a question that you want and sometimes it might get picked and sometimes it won't... and then ... and then you have your enquiry and then you can have like lots of different opinions depending on how open your question is...

R: That's interesting. Thank you...

Jeffrey: Vernon?

Vernon: What I like about P4C is you get... at the end you get a choice to do enquiry, final thoughts or 'philosophical play'. And what philosophical play is um is when you could be creative of what you do and think of things what you could draw ... maybe do a test with other people and enquiry is when we have a question and then we all answer it and try and give different thoughts and agree and disagree with each other and final thoughts is when we get all of our final thoughts on the board or on paper and then we ... we discuss it... um Mia

Mia: The thing I like about P4C is that uh ... our... we get to share our opinions with the whole class and it doesn't matter if it's right or wrong, it only matters if like you think it's right or if you like think it's wrong what other people said.

R: Uh huh...

Zak: What I like about P4C is you have more time to do stuff by yourself like cos most of the time you have to work with your partners but sometimes in P4C you think

by yourself and then you could tell people about it ... so most...and then I like the activities as well that you do in it.

R: So you might get some time just to think on your own...

Zak: yer../ (talkover)

R: before talking to other people...

Zak: yer (talkover)

R: And you like that, but you also like when you get to do other things

Zak: Yer... Bathsheba

Bathsheba: I like P4C when we do 'first thoughts' and 'final thoughts' is when right at the first one, if you do 'first thoughts' and you get something wrong when we do our 'final thoughts' we know that it's wrong and then and then we just, like, change it a little bit but like if we think it's right we just keep it for our 'final thoughts'

R: Uh huh! Thank you. So... you talked about what P4C lessons are like... um **'How are they different from other lessons?'**

Mia: It's because P4C is different to other lessons because in like Literacy you have to learn about like er adverbial phrases, expanded noun phrases and other things.. but in P4C you only think about enquiry stimuluses, first thoughts, final thoughts and what you think about the stimulus and that's completely different to other lessons..  
Vernon...

Vernon: I think what's different with P4C is um you could, you could share thoughts what you have in your brain about the enquiry and you could um always agree with someone and if normally if you agree then they might agree more with you and you could, you could make, like, a little 'agree group' and after and then more people agree with you and then someone could um someone could switch it up but in other lessons you can't really switch up the um the questions or the lessons so that's..

R: SO, can I /(talkover) Can I ask a question **'Do you behave differently then towards each other, towards other children in a Philosophy lesson than in a Literacy lesson or something?'**

Vernon: Yer, because normally in Literacy lessons you just you just do the work by yourself or ask your partner to do... to ask but in P4C you could agree or disagree with other people. And you...

Verity: Er I think that P4C is different to other lessons because in P4C you think more than other lessons because in other lessons you might have to think, but not as thinks some different questions.

R: An... sorry, you want to talk. You talk first!

Zak: I think P4Cs different because like there's a lot more questions like in every lesson there is questions but in P4C there's lot more questions to think about and that's why I think it's different.

R: Uh huh. So, next question. I asked whether you behaved differently towards each other. Um **'Do you behave differently towards the teacher or does the teacher or is the teacher different in a Philosophy lesson?'**... what do you think?

Mia: I think the teacher can er sometimes do something different because in usual like Maths lessons they are like you have to like 'Do this, do this!' and you don't get to like usually choose what you get to do. But in like P4C you get to choose at the end if you want to do erm final thoughts, philosophical play and um and...an enquiry

R: SO you get more choice as to what you do... yer ok? **Is the teacher any different towards you?**

Verity: Sometimes, she might be different... in games and let us do more stuff that in other lessons we might not be able to do.

R: Bathsheba?

Bathsheba: Some...Most of the time in P4C the teacher writes things down, but in Maths and things she doesn't write things down.

R: You write things down, do you? she doesn't?

Bathsheba: Yer.

R: OK um... **DO you think P4C helps you in your learning and if so in what way?**

Zak: I think it helps you think about your learning because, like, sometimes it's talking about the wider world and like sometimes it's... I think it helps you in your learning because it's learning how to talk to people like see if when you're older you learn how to say 'I don't think it's that because..'. You learn how to agree and disagree kindly, not saying 'No, that's not right!'

R: Wow! Thank you.

Verity: I think in P4C it does help you with learning because it helps you think more about different questions and it gets your brain into thinking and get ... ready to think about different questions in P4C... Eh Jeffrey?

Jeffrey: I think in P4C it helps you to work together with other people in the class because one of the Cs in P4C is 'collaborative' which means work together and not

just using it in P4C you can use it in, like Maths to solve a ...question or something like that..

R: You must have guessed one of my other questions! That's really good... which is about '**Do you use that approach in other subjects ?**' and you're kind of saying yes, because I can use some of the collaborative skills in Maths that I have learnt in P4C.. is that what you have just said, am I saying it right?...Yes? Does anyone else think?... Can anyone else think of other lessons where they might use a P4C approach and they can think of 'Oh... right, you know... I've been collaborative... I that lesson.'

Mia: I also think you can be collaborative in er other lessons because if you are working in a partner and your partner is stuck on like the Maths question, you can use your collaborative skill and help your partner um with the easy parts but not tell them the answer.

Vernon: I think P4C works in project too because um I think every class gets a question what they supposed to talk about and ours is like does... every year the two years are the Same but as you work your way down it's different. Ours is '**Does adversity make you stronger?**' and I think that's a... that's something like a philosophical question because it makes you um think if adversity make you stronger which is troublesome or misfortune and you don't know if it makes you stronger or not so you have to think more about the question than normal questions.

**[SECTION MISSING]**

Total running time of focus group: 16 minutes, 58 seconds.

## Appendix 2: Ethical Approval



### Ethics Submission Form 2018 Faculty of Education, Health and Well-being

- You must complete all sections of this form in as much detail as possible. (word counts are given if necessary) If your form is incomplete, it will be returned to you to resubmit.
- You must be given approval for your research project from the University before you can begin.
- Applications should be submitted by 1st Monday of each month to FEHWResearch@wlv.ac.uk

#### SECTION ONE

##### 1. Enter Your First Name and Surname Below:

First Name	PAUL
Surname	GURTON

##### 2. Enter your University Student/ Number

0624203
---------

##### 3. Enter your University e mail address (e.g. M.Name@wlv.ac.uk)

[REDACTED]
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##### 4. Enter your daytime contact telephone number In case we need to contact you.

[REDACTED]
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##### 5. Enter the name of your Project Supervisor, Director of Studies, or Principal Investigator.

Professor Peter Lavender
--------------------------

##### 6. Which subject area is your research / project located? Please ✓ all that apply

		✓
1	FFHW	✓
2	Education	✓
3	Health	
4	Sport	
5	Psychology	
6	FSE	
7	FOSS	
8	FOA	
9	COLT	
10	Cross University Project	
	Other – Please give details below:	

7 Please indicate if this study is	
	✓
Staff Research (Externally funded)	
Staff Research (University funded)	✓

8. Which Category of Project Are You Applying For?				
Categories are outlined in the handbook from the RPU ( <a href="http://www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu">www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu</a> ) Please tick ✓				
Category A	✓	Category B		Category 0

9. Give details of service user involvement

## SECTION TWO

10. What is the title of your project?
<b>TEACHER TALK AND PUPIL TALK: USING DIALOGUE TO DEVELOP CHILDREN'S THINKING AND TEACHER PEDAGOGY</b>

11. Give details of any proposed research questions/hypothesis
<p>The proposed research questions are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How can dialogue be used to develop children's thinking?</li> <li>2) What are the effects of using a thinking skills programme on:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Teacher Pedagogy?</li> <li>b) Classroom interactions between pupil(s) and teacher, and between pupils?</li> <li>c) Children's views of their own agency in learning?</li> </ol> </li> <li>3) What are the implications of these findings in relation to the professional development of teachers?</li> </ol>

12. Briefly outline your project, stating the rationale, aims and expected outcomes. (300 words)
<p>The research project aims to investigate the effects of using talk as a pedagogical strategy and a learning tool, both generally and specifically through the use of a thinking skills programme, Philosophy For Children (P4C) developed by Lipman, Sharp and Olscanyhon (1980). The focus on reading and writing in English primary school education at the expense of the spoken word is well documented (see for example Alexander, 1999, 2006; Mercer 1995, 2000). I want to try and understand the extent to which an approach which focuses on the spoken word to develop thinking can alter teachers' understanding of teaching and learning and the effects on their wider teaching practice. I also want to find out what effect a teacher's willingness to allow children to raise and explore authentic questions in a community of enquiry has on children's views of their own agency in learning situations.</p>

The study falls within the discourse on dialogic approaches to learning, teaching and shared meaning making in the classroom. It draws upon the writing of Wells (1999), Nystrand et al. (1997), Alexander (2006), Watkins (2005) and Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick (2008). The study is located within a socio-cultural framework, and as such influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1990) who emphasise the centrality of history, culture and social interaction in learning. Of particular significance to the study is the relationship between language and thought, and the importance of social interactions in meaning making (Vygotsky, 2012). It draws upon adaptations of the core methods of Lipman's Philosophy for Children approach as developed in UK by members of SAPERE (<http://sapere.org.uk>) including notably Fisher (1996).

**13. How will your research be conducted? (750 words max.)**

**Describe the methods so that it can be easily understood by the ethics committee. Please ensure you clearly explain any acronyms and subject specific terminology.**

The proposed research is located within the critical theory paradigm. I subscribe to the view that we can only understand, and so change, the social world by understanding the structures at work which generate events and discourses (Bhaskar, 1989). Most significant amongst these are social, political, cultural, economic and gendered values and experiences. My personal positioning derives from a belief that my understanding of the world is not 'given' by what Dewey (1938) calls objective conditions, it is 'taken' by me. It is a direct relation of the world out there, which I can never fully know, and what I bring to it. The result is the sense I make (Hammersley, 1993). My espoused epistemology, therefore, is transactional and my view of reality is of that it is negotiated; any findings from research will of necessity be value-dependent (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). In adopting a hermeneutic phenomenology (Laverty, 2003) I will seek to illuminate understandings of the day to day life of the classroom and how spoken language itself is used to create the conditions for and, indeed develop, human understanding (Gadamer, 1976). I view teachers and children as active agents whose own life experiences and reflections will contribute to understanding of the theme of the study: they will be co-participants in the research.

The research will adopt a Case Study approach, using what Yin (2003) describes as a representative or typical case and what Bryman prefers to call an 'exemplifying case' (2008, p.56), as it allows the researcher to gain access to an organisation because it has adopted a particular approach or technology. Two schools will be used as research venues, chosen because of their use of a particular thinking skills programme (P4C) and their implementation of the approach will be examined along with their general approach to using dialogue as a learning tool. I will be working with teachers, teaching assistants and children (from aged 6 to 11) to examine how the approaches used affect their thinking about the learning and teaching process and how they operate together within a community.

Data will be collected using a variety of techniques: observations, interviews (both individual and group) and discourse analysis. As the researcher, I will be keeping a research journal and field notes which will help with the process of contextualising the separate occasions on which data is collected. As I am not an insider, not being a member of staff within either school, I will not be a participant observer, nor will I encounter the

insider/outsider dilemma (Le Gallais, 2008). However, I will need to ensure that I have a full understanding of how the schools work and as the research instruments collect qualitative data that is open to interpretation, I will need to take steps to ensure that threats to validity are minimised. I plan, for example to involve participants in interviews and observations in evaluating the veracity of the transcripts (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2017). Discourse analysis will add some elements of a quantitative approach to the study, when noting the frequency of pedagogical 'moves' such as, for example 'elicitation' (questioning) by the teacher and 'bidding' (raising the hand to answer a question), or the length of pupil and teacher utterances (see for example, Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975 and Trickey and Topping, 2007). The research will fall into two phases – first at one school, then another.

#### **14. How will your data be analysed?**

Data gathered from the research venues will take different forms: narrative observations, recorded interviews and discourse transcripts. It will be analysed in a number of ways: for example methodological triangulation will be used to increase confidence in the findings (Cohen Mannion and Morrison, 2017) and ecological validity will be sought to include and address as many characteristics of the given situation studied as possible without compromising the anonymity of the venues used (Brock Utne, 1996). As the data collected will be predominantly qualitative the raw data is likely to influence the way it is coded. Emerging themes will be selected, reviewed and interpreted. But care will be needed in interpretation. At this stage respondents and participants will be involved to strengthen validity.

At an early stage in the research, piloting activities will enable refinement. It is, for example, envisaged that early piloting of interviews with teachers and children may determine changes to some questions of elements of questions. A coding framework for observations will be developed from preliminary work (Newby, 2014).

#### **15. Is ethical approval required by an external agency? (e.g. NHS, company, other university, outside organisation, etc.)**

1. NO

#### **16. What in your view are the ethical considerations involved in this project? (e.g. confidentiality, consent, risk, physical or psychological harm, etc.) Please explain in full**

**sentences. Do not simply list the issues. You should also make it clear how you are going to deal with issues with regard to your own welfare and safety.**

Areas	✓	Intervention
Confidentiality	✓	Names of schools and participants will be anonymised
Consent	✓	I will seek informed consent from school, parents/carers
Participants Under 18	✓	Children will be asked for their agreement to participate. This will be recorded, however they and adults will also be informed that they may withdraw at any stage

**17. Have participants been/will participants be, fully informed of the risks and benefits of participating and of their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the research at any time?**

1. YES (Outline your procedures for informing participants in the space below.)

Schools will be approached and the nature of the research explained. When ethical approval has been given, consent of participating teachers and TAs will be sought with a written consent form and a letter sent to parents to explain the study. Classroom observations will rely upon presumed consent with a letter to parents, but interviews with children will require informed consent from parents. Each time the researcher works with the adults or children involved in the study, they will be informed that they may withdraw at any point.

**18. How will you ensure that the identity of your participants is protected (See RPU website ([www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu](http://www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu)) and follow link to Ethical Guidance pages for guidance on anonymity)**

The participants will be verbally assured of anonymity and that confidentiality will be kept. The process of anonymization will ensure that neither the school nor the individuals can be identified (pseudonyms etc. to be used) (BERA 2018)

**19. How will you ensure that data remains confidential ((See RPU website ([www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu](http://www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu)) and follow link to Ethical Guidance pages for definition of confidentiality)**

Confidentiality will be maintained by process of anonymity explained above and storage of data. Observation and interview notes, transcripts and recording will be kept in locked filing cabinet in a University office or password-protected computer or encrypted pen drive. GDPR guidelines (2018) will be followed so that during the research period and at any eventual publication date no identities will be divulged. In the event of a disclosure school safeguarding policy will be adhered to and also the university safeguarding policy will be applied.

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**20. How will you store your data during and after the project? (See RPU website ([www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu](http://www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu)) and follow link to Ethical Guidance pages for definition of and guidance on data protection and storage).**

As explained above the following steps will be taken: observation and interview notes, transcripts and recording will be kept in locked filing cabinet in a University office or password-protected computer or encrypted pen drive.

Data will continue to be kept in a secure place until the conclusion of the EdD (envisaged as 2 years) and then disposed of in confidential waste.

At all times BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational research (2018) will be followed.

### SECTION THREE

The following questions must be answered otherwise your form will not be reviewed and it will need to be resubmitted to the panel at a later date.

**21. Does Your Research Involve Children Under 18 years of Age?**

Please delete and leave your response below

1. Yes

If Yes, Do you have an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate from the Criminal Records Bureau/Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)?

2. Yes

**22. Are participants in your study going to be recruited from a potentially vulnerable group? (See RPU website ([www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu](http://www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu)) and follow link to Ethical Guidance pages for definition of vulnerable groups )**

1. YES (Describe below which groups and what measures you will take to respect their rights and safeguard them)

Groups of participants will be children under the age of 18. Their rights will be respected by the ability to opt out of research at any point. The focus of the study is, in part, concerned with student voice, and so this fact will be stressed in dialogue with them.

The researcher has an enhanced DBS certificate and when working with children he will never be working with individuals, only with groups in a supervised capacity. Permission to undertake the research will have been obtained by the school and informed consent for those children who will participate in group interviews/enquiries. These will always take place in a public supervised space within school. Should a disclosure occur, both school and university safeguarding policy will be abided by as described above.

**23. Does your research fit into any of the following security-sensitive categories? (For definition of security sensitive categories see RPU webpages ([www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu](http://www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu)) follow links to Ethical Guidance). If so please complete questions 22-26**

	Security Sensitive Categories	If YES, please tick below. ✓	If NO, please tick below. ✓
1	Commissioned by the military		✓
2	Commissioned under an EU security call		✓
3	Involve the acquisition of security clearances		✓
4	Concerns terrorist or extreme groups		✓

**24. Does your research involve the storage on a computer of any records, statements or other documents that can be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts? Please delete and leave your response below.**

1. NO

**25. Will your research involve the electronic transmission (e.g. as an email attachment) of any records or statements that can be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts? Please delete and leave your response below.**

1. NO

**26. Do you agree to store electronically on a secure University file store any records or statements that can be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts. Do you also agree to scan and upload any paper documents with the same sort of content? Access to this file store will be protected by a password unique to you. Please confirm you understand and agree to these conditions.**

1. YES I understand and agree to the conditions

**27. Do you agree NOT to transmit electronically to any third party documents in the University secure document store?**

1. YES I agree

**28. Will your research involve visits to websites that might be associated with extreme, or terrorist, organisations? (for definition of extreme or terrorist organisations see RPU webpages ([www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu](http://www.wlv.ac.uk/rpu)) and follow links to Ethical Guidance.**

2. NO

29. You are advised that visits to websites that might be associated with extreme or terrorist organisations may be subject to surveillance by the police. Accessing those sites from University IP addresses might lead to police enquiries. Do you understand this risk?

1. YES I understand

30. Appendices (All submissions) Please list the items that you are submitting with this document. (These will need to be submitted to [FEHWRResearch@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:FEHWRResearch@wlv.ac.uk) ) You may want to include additional information that will help the panel with their decision such as your proposal. You need to provide examples of research instruments, recruitment posters and leaflets, information sheets (age appropriate) assent forms (for children), consent forms, risk assessment if research is carried out abroad .

These will be supplied as drafted from emergent themes. School permission letter can be supplied if requested.


#### Section 4

#### CONFIRMATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL AND FEEDBACK ON SUBMISSION

#### TO BE COMPLETED AS INDICATED, BY MODULE LEADER, SUPERVISOR AND/OR HEAD OF ETHICS PANEL

##### CATEGORY A PROPOSALS:

*I confirm that the proposal for research being made by the above student/member of staff is a category A proposal and that s/he may now continue with the proposed research activity:*

For a student's proposal – Name of module leader or supervisor giving approval	
For a member of staff's proposal – name of Head of Ethics panel giving approval	Diana Bannister
Signed	
Date	25/10/2018

##### CATEGORY B PROPOSALS:

*I confirm that the proposal for research being made by above student/member of staff is a category B proposal and that all requirements for category B proposals have been met.*

##### On behalf of students (only):

Name of module leader or supervisor
Signed
Date

**On behalf of members of staff and students**

*I confirm that the proposal for research being made by above student/member of staff is a category B proposal and has the following decision*

<p><b>Approved</b> with no conditions/ amendments. Continue with study.</p>
<p><b>Approved subject to conditions.</b> Make minor/major amendments.</p>
<p><b>Not Approved –</b> Substantial re-write. Resubmit as New application</p>

Signed	
Name of Chair of Ethics Panel	
Date	

**Checklist of submissions required for Category B proposals:**

Outline summary: rationale and expected benefits from the study, with a statement of what the researcher is proposing to do and how	
Explanation of the methodology to be used	
An information sheet and copy of a consent form to be used with subjects	
Details of how information will be kept	
Details of how results will be fed back to participants	
Letter of consent from any collaborating institutions	
Letter of consent from head of institution wherein any research activity will take place	

**ALL PROPOSALS:**

<b>Office Use Only:</b>	
<b>Submission Number</b>	<b>102018PGUOW</b>
<b>Date of Review</b>	<b>29<sup>th</sup> October 2018</b>
<b>Identified Category</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>Decision</b>	<b>Approved with Provisos</b>
<b>Comments and Feedback</b>	<p>Thank you for your submission to the IOE Ethics Committee. Your application has been reviewed by a panel, and approved with provisos. This is something that can be addressed in discussion with your supervisor, however, I am more than happy to discuss if required. (See below - points 3 and 4)</p> <p>The feedback from the panel was:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This is a really well formulated research proposal– carefully considered and nicely developed.</li> <li>2. You have satisfactorily addressed and considered the study's ethical dimensions.</li> <li>3. The panel felt that the issue of informed consent with the children might be given further thought/discussed further.</li> <li>4. You should also give further consideration to the procedures for accepting/rejecting children who volunteer for interview, for example, and the ethics of handling the sensitivities involved here.</li> </ol>
<b>Proposed Actions</b>	Address points 3 and 4 in discussion with your supervisor.
<b>Date of Further Review</b>	Not required

## Appendix 3: Letter to a student

Gurton, P. (2021) 'Letter to Carmen' *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 61(3) (in preparation)

[Australian Journal of Adult Learning - Adult Learning Australia \(ala.asn.au\)](http://ala.asn.au)

Dear Carmen,

It was great to meet you the other day at our university open day and I sincerely hope that you will consider applying to take up a place to train to become a primary school teacher. I think you have much to offer the profession.

You said that you had struggled at school because the lessons always seemed to follow a set format with the teacher leading at the start of the lesson, maybe modelling a skill or teaching some facts from history or biology, but there had been little group work or whole class discussion. You felt that this had not worked for you. But your eyes lit up when you talked about the approach one teacher had taken. I think you said you were in year 6 at the time and he had set lots of cooperative challenges. The class had to work in groups and share ideas. You also remembered that this had involved class discussions, sometimes about things close to home, like peer pressure about how to behave and what clothes to wear and things like that. It seemed that this teacher had built strong relationships with the class.

After our chat I went away feeling that I could have done more to allay your fears about the current state of primary education in England and in particular the culture which encourages 'teaching to the test'. But I was very heartened to hear you talk about Paulo Freire and his ideas of dialogue in education. Not many in the world of primary schools refer to Freire. I found out about him when I was doing some further study after I became a teacher educator. My director of studies pointed me in his direction and I must say, I was really engaged. Most people read his book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. But you will find some of his lesser-known works, like 'Letters to Cristina', for example, give a real insight into the man and how he developed his thinking even from his childhood experiences when his family were thrown upon hard times. He explains how his parents never reprimanded him for asking questions, and

gives a touching description of his father, who struggled with poverty and never forced discussion of a topic which did not interest his children, but questioned and challenged and introduced them to new ideas. I wholeheartedly agree with you that we should not just be filling up children with facts. We should be developing the whole person and opening them up to ideas like Paulo Freire's dad. That is why I think you will be interested in what I have to tell you in the rest of this letter.

I have been visiting a school recently whose approach is anything but 'teaching to the test'. Some of what they do sounds like what you remember from your year 6 class. There is a good deal of group and class discussion, involving a lot of cooperation. St Luke's primary is an inner city school in the north of England. It is truly multi-cultural: children come from a range of ethnic, religious and language backgrounds. They tell me that at last count there were 32 languages spoken in the school! I got to know about it from a teacher who works there whom I met at a conference. She was proud of her teaching and what the school was achieving and invited me to visit to see for myself.

The school runs what they call a 'concept curriculum'. Each term children have a topic focussing on a key question such as 'Does adversity make you stronger?' or 'Are you ready to take your place in society?' These questions which, as you can see, have an overtly moral, philosophical or sociological slant, are led by PSHE or RE, the subjects that the deputy head teacher says 'really matter'. But they have been carefully planned to dovetail with national curriculum requirements for history, geography, art, design etc. I suppose you might say that the approach attempts to marry together an objectives-led model of curriculum design with an enquiry-based approach. In fact it reminds me of an approach taken by a famous educationalist named Lawrence Stenhouse in the 1970s with something called the Humanities Curriculum Project – HCR for short.

I have visited the school on several occasions, keen to see how the curriculum works in practice and what I can learn from it to impart to our student teachers. Each time I have come away really excited! Teachers use a more orthodox approach to teach core skills, such as number bonds in maths and the children actually do really well in national tests. But they frequently devote entire lessons to what they call 'enquiries' where the teacher and children discuss issues together. This approach, and a

number of the pedagogic features, uses a thinking skills programme which you may have heard of called Philosophy for Children. It originated in America in the 1970s with a University lecturer named Matthew Lipman. The children work in pairs or groups to identify a question they would like to discuss derived from their termly topic with links to RE, English, History, Geography or Art, for example. Then they vote on it and the whole class discusses the question. I have seen enquiries with questions such as 'Is life always in our control?'; 'When is it right to be selfless?'; and 'Terrorism: who or what is this violence and hatred targeted towards?' These are big questions, as you can see, and brave ones for a primary school to be taking on. But the children tackle them with enthusiasm and gusto, expressing their views and opinions and importantly using their everyday life experiences to draw upon in their discussions. They are really positive about these lessons. When I have talked to them they have said things like 'It's good because everyone gets to express their opinions' and 'it helps us engage with others more and see how they think.'

The teachers are really committed to developing children's ability to listen to each other respectfully and articulate their own ideas. The deputy head says that they have chosen themes which are really important to children in this community. Some teachers say that this approach allows them to feel closer to the children and to talk about issues which children encounter in their lives, either through social media or other life experiences. They say that these themes are not covered in the national curriculum, but they feel that they would be doing the children a disservice if they did not talk about them. One teacher said to me that it allows them to explore concepts that are 'difficult and untouchable even using other approaches to learning'.

I find the whole thing really amazing to watch, and bear in mind I have twenty years' classroom teaching behind me! In my career in primary schools I only saw this kind of approach before in the Early Years. Further up the school teachers would always be concerned about 'covering the curriculum'. Having time to discuss issues that children encountered in their daily lives never seemed to have a high priority, which is bizarre if you think about it. However, recently I have found that schools are using approaches which at least devote some time to class discussion. And approaches such as Philosophy for Children are becoming more widespread, even if they are often something tagged on to the end of the week. Not so at St Luke's! Here the approach permeates the curriculum. Children have learned a variety of techniques

like making eye contact, using the previous speaker's name and using words and phrases to demonstrate their appreciation of each other's views. They are also encouraged to always give reasons for what they say. They use phrases like 'When you say xxxx, what do you mean by that?' or 'I agree with that position' or 'building on what Naomi said...'. They challenge each other and the teacher to clarify meanings. It's really refreshing because it's like a classroom community at work. The teachers and children are on a journey together. And the teachers do not see themselves as 'the fount of all knowledge'. When I see teachers answering children's questions, sharing their own opinions, but seeking children's views, too I feel that they show they are human, they can make mistakes and they are not sure about things. This really forms respectful relationships between the teachers and the children.

I am telling you all this to show you that there certainly is another way of teaching and it is alive and kicking in some schools in England and it is possible to take this approach. It may be that a didactic approach is more common – and encouraged by a curriculum that views education principally as passing on valued cultural knowledge. But the 'problem raising' approach that this school uses, where children and teacher use dialogue to discuss controversial issues together, can be successfully achieved. It really does make me think of what Freire was talking about when he identified a dialogic approach like this as able to emancipate. These children are beginning to use language to interpret the world. They are developing their own agency by being critical of reality, emerging from what Freire called a naïve or magical consciousness to a critical awareness that not everything around them can be interpreted at face value.

I saw a really powerful example of this in one of the class enquiries. It was what we in primary education call, rather cringily, a 'wow moment'! A year six class was discussing terrorism, comparing the religion of Islam with what they knew and could find out about the terrorist group Isis. It was a really good lesson on demystifying what the children might be hearing about in the news - what Stenhouse would definitely have termed a 'controversial issue' - and so really worth investigating with children. The teacher was not seeking to promote her views either. She was genuinely allowing them to collect the information they knew to make judgements and put forward views. The Manchester arena bombing had occurred only recently

where 23 people died, some of them children, and the school was not far from Manchester. At one point in the lesson a Moslem boy – we will call him Imran – began to talk about views promoted by the self-proclaimed leader of Islamic state, Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi. The discussion had reached a summary conclusion that this man was proposing views that were at odds with the precepts of Islam. Imran suddenly said, ‘Well in that case he is using his faith as an advantage. He is portraying himself as God.’ He went on to say, ‘That means he is disrespecting God. People will be ashamed.’ There was a hush in the classroom as I think children all realised what a profound statement Imran had made, and what a critical moment this was for him.

Anyway, I hope that I have given you food for thought and that maybe you will consider applying to train to be a teacher with us, as I said at the start of the letter. If not, I wish you all the best in what you decide to do next.

Best regards,

Paul Gurton

