



Talk for Learning



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Structure of the presentation

- Why Talk for Learning?
- The background (including research)
- The context – our spoken language and the educational and social context for talk.
- The North Yorkshire Talk for Learning project

Why a focus on talk and what is it do with us?

- ‘Young children talking and thinking in partnership with supportive adults are operating at the leading edge of their potential, in a zone of proximal development. At this level they are able to go well beyond their limitations of what they can do alone and unaided ... taking children beyond themselves so to speak’.

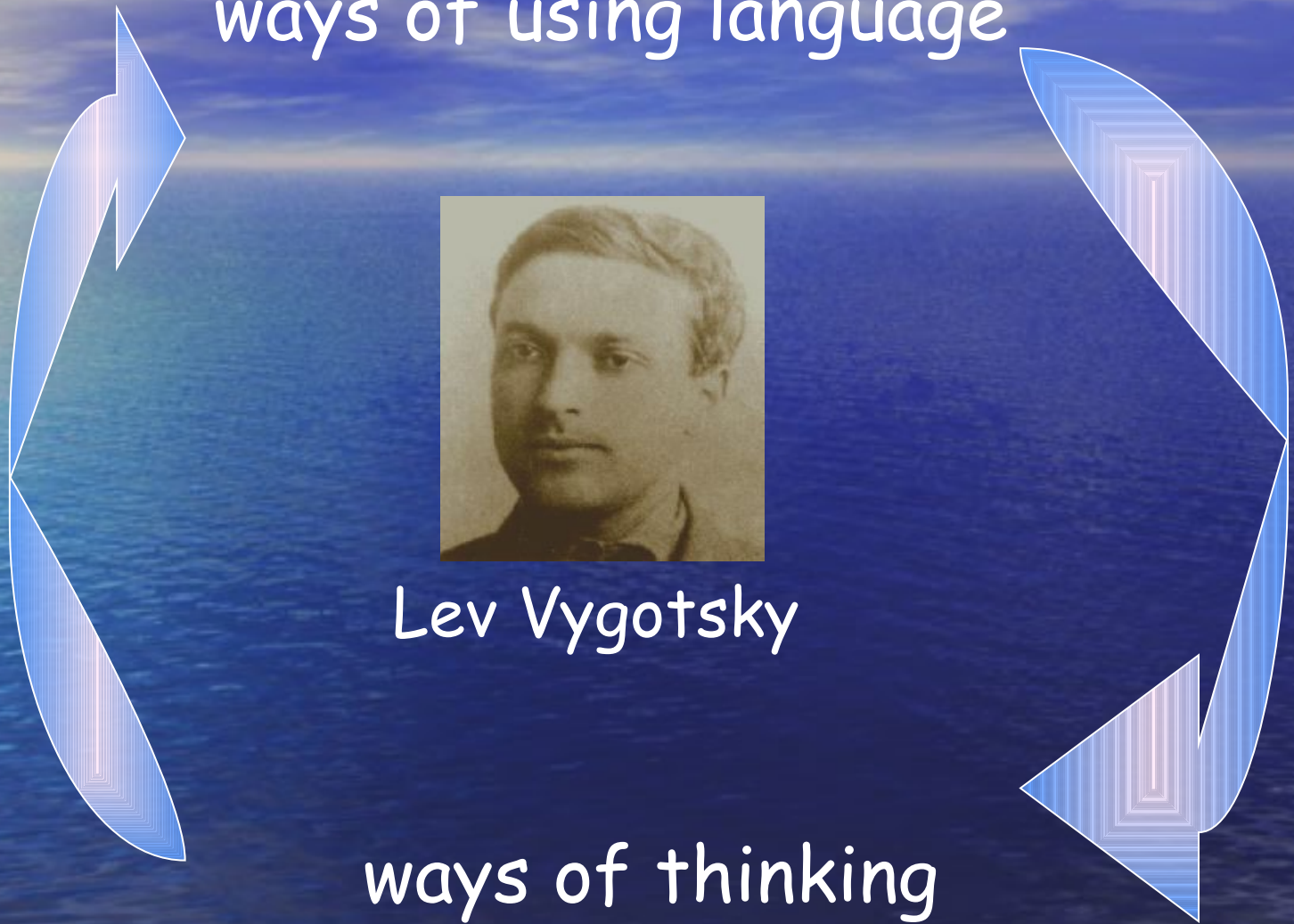
(Vygotsky)

ways of using language



Lev Vygotsky

ways of thinking



Words as tools for thinking

'Real concepts are impossible without words, and thinking in concepts does not exist beyond verbal thinking.

That is why the central moment in concept formation ...is a specific use of words as functional tools.'

Vygotsky (1978)

What is our role?

We need to provide the settings, the stories, the materials, the situations and the supportive adult partnerships which enable children to talk the new and the unknown into the meaningful framework of recalled and known features of their lives.

Rose Report

‘Far more attention needs to be given, right from the start, to promoting speaking and listening skills to make sure that children build a good stock of words, learn to listen attentively and speak clearly and confidently. Speaking and listening, together with writing and reading, are prime communication skills that are central to children’s intellectual, social and emotional development’ (2006)

OfSTED' S survey of speaking and listening in schools 2006

How can we improve provision for speaking and listening?

- Give teachers the confidence to be creative and take risks
- Provide contexts for talk that engage and enthuse pupils
- Make effective and selective use of talk partners
- Improve management of class discussions
- Teach listening skills directly

How can we improve provision for speaking and listening?

- Teach speaking and listening directly, including Standard English
- Improve teachers' understanding of the nature of talk
- Extend use of drama techniques
- Improve assessment
- Plan for talk over the longer term and improve progression

Talk for Learning

- recognises that talk is central to teaching and learning
- promotes **dialogic teaching**
- focuses on both teacher-led talk and talk amongst children
- ‘Good talk does not just happen – it needs to be planned and pondered’
- makes Talk for Learning a whole school activity

What is language for?

- Language is not just for sharing information
- It is a tool for thinking together
- We don't just interact with language, we *interthink* with it

What can children learn from dialogue?

- New information
- Ways of communicating
- Ways of making sense of the world
- Ways of thinking *together*
- Ways of thinking *alone*

'Most learning does not happen suddenly: we do not one moment fail to understand something and the next moment grasp it entirely.' (Douglas Barnes, 1992)

**Each day's talk in a classroom
should be part of a long
conversation**

The dialogic teacher...

- asks questions which encourage children to state their points of view, reveal their misunderstandings and make relevant comments
- models ways of using talk for thinking
- uses talk to guide the progress of children's learning
- balances whole-class and group activities
- makes talk 'visible' to children
- uses talk to guide the trajectory of children's learning

Why is group talk useful when learning?

- Children are more likely to admit their ignorance and errors than in the whole class
- They can share knowledge to find a solution that no single child would have found
- Talking helps remembering (by putting thoughts into words)
- More able children can help the less able
- More able children develop their understanding by having to explain
- Less able children can observe and 'internalise' new ways of solving problems

What are the effects of teaching children how to use talk for learning?

They...

- begin to use much more Exploratory Talk
- become better at solving problems *together*
- become better at solving problems *alone*

The North Yorkshire



Talk for Learning Project

So what is the talk for learning project about?

- Teacher talk
- Pupil talk
- Organisational strategies to promote teaching and learning through dialogue
- Raising standards and expectations

‘Classroom talk should be transformed into cognitively challenging dialogue’

(Robin Alexander)

The Primacy of Talk in Learning: arguments worth considering

Communicative: Talk is humankind's principal means of communication, especially in an era when children are more becoming familiar with visual images than printed words.

Social: Talk builds relationships, confidence and a sense of self

Cultural: it creates and sustains individual and collective identities.

Neuroscientific: Language, and especially spoken language, builds connections in the brain; during the early and pre-adolescent years particularly.

Psychological: language & the development of thought are inseparable. Learning is a social process, and high-quality talk helps to scaffold the pupil's understanding from what is currently known to what has yet to be known.

Political: Democracies need citizens who argue, reason, challenge, question, present cases and evaluate them. Democracies decline when citizens listen rather than talk, and when they comply rather than debate.

Pedagogical: process and process-product research shows that cognitively enriching talk engages pupils' attention and motivation, increases time on task and produces measurable learning gains.

The five principles of dialogic teaching and learning

collective: teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class;

reciprocal: teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints;

supportive: children articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings;

And the powerhouses of children's learning

cumulative; teachers and children build on their own and each others' ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry;

purposeful: teachers plan and steer classroom talk with specific educational goals in view.

The first three principles need to be in place in order to maximise and enable the potential of the last two principles.

Sustained shared thinking

- An episode in which two or more individuals ‘work together’ in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend.

(Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years DfES 1 84185 758 0)

Teacher talk and pupil talk

- Rote
- Recitation
- Instruction/Exposition
- Discussion
- Scaffolded dialogue

The role of the adult

- Modelling
- Mediating
- Extending language
- Asking questions
- Using alternatives to questions
- Giving children time to think
- Responding to children's answers
- Focussing attention on a specific aspect of talk
- Provider of opportunities and resources
- Direct teaching
- To be tuned in to children's interests
- Identify potential of learning in the situation

Eleven kinds of pupil talk

- Narrate
- Explain
- Instruct
- Ask different kinds of question
- Receive and build upon answers
- Analyse and solve problems
- Speculate and imagine
- Explore and evaluate ideas
- Discuss
- Argue and/or defend a position
- Negotiate
- ***And ask questions of their own***

Organisation

- Whole class
- Group led by teacher
- Teacher – pupil individual
- Pupil-pupil
- Pupil led group

RECOGNISING DIALOGIC TEACHING

‘If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue.’

Mikhail Bakhtin (1986 *Speech Genres and Other Essays*,
University of Texas Press p.168)

But what kind of talk are we talking about?

- Authentic dialogue is when attention is being paid, when all of the participants are learning how to learn off each other; teacher from pupil, pupil from teacher, pupil from pupil. There must be no points-scoring but intention to hear the other properly to respect what is said and agree or disagree properly.

(Dorothy Heathcote) The Subtle Tongue'

....if we want children to talk to learn...

What **they** say probably matters more than what teachers say.

- It is the qualities of **extension** and **cumulation** which transform classroom talk into purposeful and productive dialogue where **questions** and **answers** and **feedback progressively build** into coherent and expanding chains of enquiry and **understanding**.

Why are we promoting dialogic teaching and learning?

- Dialogue is not just a feature of learning but one of its most essential tools.
- Children's answers can never be the end of a learning exchange (as in many classrooms it all too readily tends to be) but at its centre.
- Dialogue is an important means by which pupils actively engage and teachers constructively intervene.