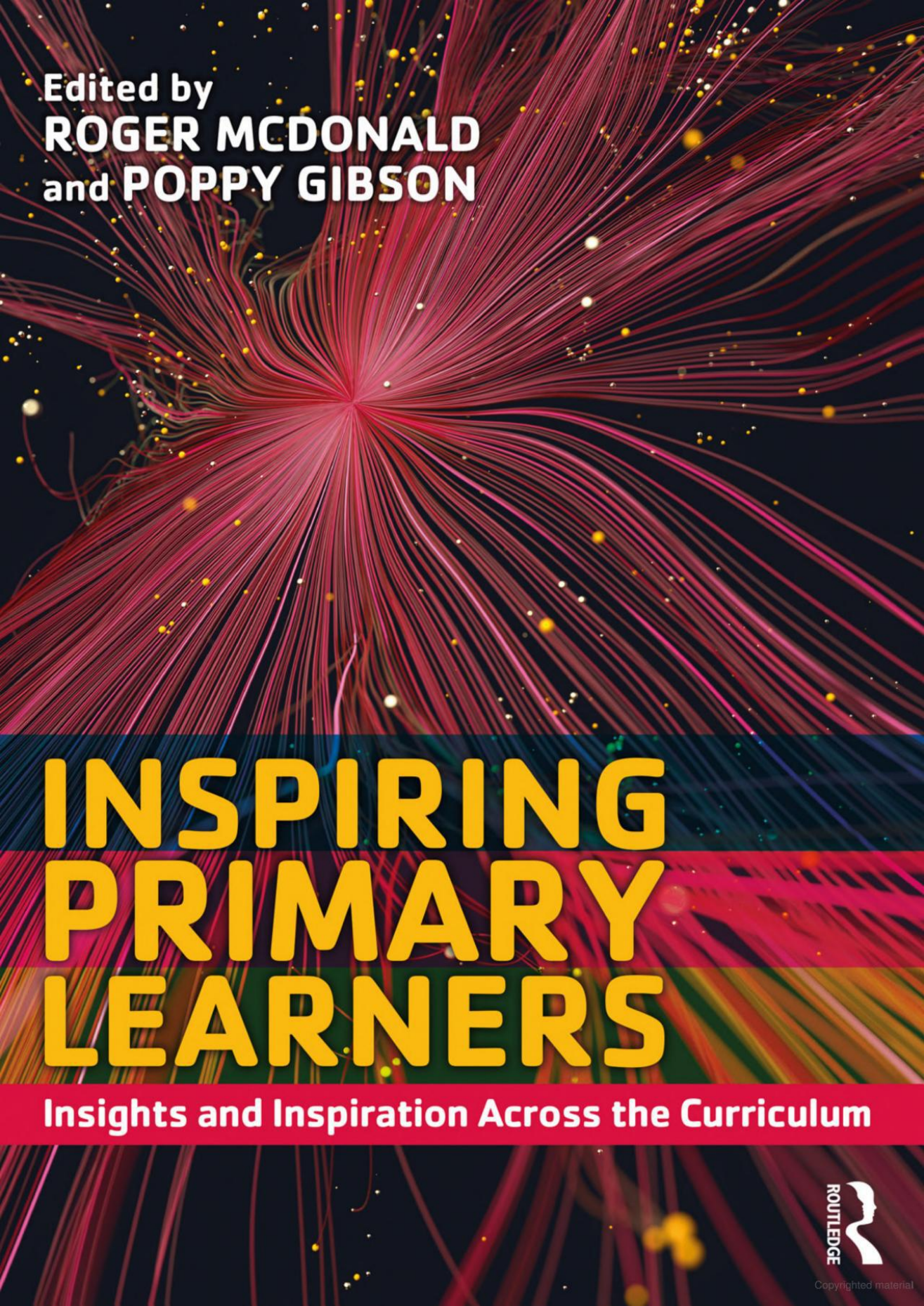

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: McDonald, Roger, 1973- editor. | Gibson, Poppy, editor.
Title: Inspiring primary learners: insights and inspiration across the curriculum / Edited by Roger McDonald and Poppy Gibson.
Description: Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020038927 | ISBN 9780367110642 (hardback) | ISBN 9780367110659 (paperback) | ISBN 9780429024597 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Primary school teaching–Great Britain. | Education, Primary–Great Britain. | Effective teaching–Great Britain.
Classification: LCC LB1556.7.G7 I57 2021 | DDC 372.24/10941–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020038927

ISBN: 978-0-367-11064-2 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-11065-9 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-02459-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Interstate
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the students, staff, and partnership schools who have taken time to share their practice. It has been wonderful to be able to share ways in which schools have continued to inspire primary children through creating a love of learning and discovery. In particular we would like to thank:

Belmont Primary School, Erith, London: Special thanks to all the fantastic staff and children.

Bishop John Robinson C of E Primary School, Thamesmead, Royal Borough of Greenwich: Special thanks to Jo Richardson and all the fantastic staff and children.

Canary Wharf College, London: Special thanks to all the fantastic staff and children.

Charlton Manor Primary School, London: Special thanks to Tim Baker and all the fantastic staff and children.

Christ Church C of E Primary, Hertfordshire: Special thanks to Marianne Mitchell and all the fantastic staff and children.

Coopers Lane Primary School, Grove Park, London: Special thanks to all the fantastic staff and children.

Ealdham Primary and Nursery School, Eltham, London: Special thanks to Headteacher Christian York, Deputy Headteacher Lindsay Hance, Literacy Leader, Samantha Leslie, and all the fantastic staff and children.

Forster Park Primary School, London: Special thanks to Rebecca Gonsalves and all the fantastic staff and children.

Foxfield Primary School, Woolwich, London: Special thanks to all the fantastic staff and children.

Heronsgate Primary School, Thamesmead, Royal Borough of Greenwich. Special thanks to Renu Partap: RE subject lead and School Direct manager and all the fantastic staff and children.

Longlands Primary School, Broxbourne: Special thanks to Liliana Ioana Dudau and all the fantastic staff and children.

Plumcroft Primary School, Plumstead, London: Special thanks to Sophie Nichol and all the fantastic staff and children.

Sadie Phillips: Link up with Sadie through her social media channels: https://literacywithmissp.com/2018/08/07/harnessing-the-power-of-working-walls/ @SadiePhillips literacy-withmissp.com

St Matthew's C of E Primary School, Birmingham: Special thanks to Headteacher, Sonia Thompson, and all the fantastic staff and children.

Thorntree primary school, Charlton, London: Special thanks to Lucy Brown and all the fantastic staff and children.

West Minster Primary School, Sheerness: Special thanks to Tina Ovenden, Holly Gransden, Danielle Cunningham, Wendy Kennedy, Kerry Woolnough, J. Malinauskas, Stacey Spokes, Krystina Barrett, Lisa Hardy, and all the fantastic staff and children.

Wingfield Primary School, Kidbrooke, London: Special thanks to all the fantastic staff and children.

Woodhill Primary School, Woodhill, London: Special thanks to all the fantastic staff and children.

Special thanks also to **Michael Green** who, through our regular conversations, sparked the inspiration to produce this book.

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Introduction

Poppy Gibson and Roger McDonald

Thank you for choosing to read this book, which is an exciting collaboration between primary practitioners, university lecturers, and ITE experts. This book draws together detailed insights from UK primary schools in the form of case studies and vignettes from practicing teachers, together with an academic evaluative voice to support you in making connections and developing your own practice through a shared experience. The aim of this book is to offer the reader insights into schools' practice in inspiring primary learners across the curriculum.

We are proud that this book brings together experts from across the country including colleagues from Leeds Becket University, University of Roehampton, University of Worcester, Canterbury Christ Church University, Bishop Grosseteste University, Wingfield Primary School, Plumcroft Primary School, and the founders of the Writing for Pleasure Centre.

We have identified a need for this book due to many of the routes into teaching such as PGCE, BA, School Direct, Apprenticeship or SCITT placing students, for their extended practice, in schools based on a number of criteria which include location, age phase, and the need for a contrasting experience. There are, of course, many benefits to this but one possible limitation is the students' ability to discover insights into other excellent practices taking place in schools they will not have the opportunity to visit. This book provides, not only the insights, but a guided analysis and evaluation through the narrative provided.

In addition, we have seen a shift in pedagogy taking place in some primary schools with an increase in the objective led curriculum and a focus on testing due to pressures schools are experiencing. This shift has resulted in pedagogy sometimes shifting from one characterised by creativity, to teaching which, arguably, is compliant in nature. This book directly addresses this shift through the innovative way in which insights into practice are provided across the curriculum. Through each chapter you will be able to see a range of practices from a variety of schools in the UK which inspire primary learners.

Feedback from students regarding academic texts used on Initial Teacher Education programmes indicates that often the texts they are directed towards can be theoretically driven, and they struggle to make the connections with what they read and how this relates to practice and their experiences. A key feature of this text is that the book begins with the practice which is underpinned by the theory. The emphasis will be on practitioner voice; woven throughout each chapter in a variety of modes including interviews, reflections, thought

pieces, and case studies. In addition, this book encourages student teachers to engage educational debates, prompted throughout the chapters in the form of critical questions.

Presented in two parts, you can take a journey through the subjects of the UK National Curriculum in Part One, and then through a range of wider issues and debates in Part Two. This book offers experience, expertise, and valuable insights into the primary classroom across the curriculum, reflecting on practice and strategies in order to help practitioners achieve educational excellence.

This book also offers the latest relevant insights into educational practice in UK primary schools through case study snapshots provided through the integral partnerships between a range of schools and the School of Education at the University of Greenwich, as well as the wider partnership the university has with other educational institutions. This partnership allows for the exciting culmination of valuable case studies with the experience and knowledge of lecturers in the field of Primary Education, who are equipped both with knowledge of the primary classroom, and the pedagogy behind training teachers at university level.

We hope that this book will compliment your experience as a student teacher, practitioner in school, or as a researcher. Its aim is not to provide a 'how to guide' or suggest that the case studies we feature are a holy grail. Instead we hope that the chapters will spark conversations through the insights given into other schools' practice. As professionals, we are all working in the same, often contested, space of education but with a clear aim to inspire primary learners. We hope this book will support you in your exciting, unique, challenging, and inspirational journey.

Whether you are here as a student, a primary school teacher, or a teacher educator, we hope you enjoy reading this book as much as the authors enjoyed writing it.

Be inspired!

Part 1

The primary curriculum

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1 Empowering communication through speaking, reading, and writing

Deborah Reynolds, Sarah Smith, and Kat Vallely

Critical questions

When in the Early Years environment, how can you show children that you are actively listening to them with more than just your ears?
When providing children with talking opportunities, what skills do we need to encourage them to use?
When was the last time you felt fully included in a discussion? What made the conversation so inclusive, and what skills were you drawing upon?
What perspective(s) do you take your values around reading from?
How many children's picture books can you name with a BAME character or author that have been published in the past five years?
What purpose do children (and adults) have to write in the classroom?
Who is the audience for the writing?
In what way does the writing connect to children's own experiences?

Introduction

The subject of English in the primary school has been the focus of great debate for educationalists, politicians, and the general public. The news agenda is focused each year on the percentage of pupils in Year 6 who leave school 'being able' to read or write. Of course, those of us who work in education know that the vast majority of pupils leave being able to read and write. Whether they are able to meet an arbitrary mark in an outdated testing system is another matter. English, or 'literacy' as it is sometimes called, is on the political agenda. 'literacy' is seen as a valuable commodity which correlates with economic growth. Therefore the ability to 'measure' literacy has increasingly become important in order to justify the money spent on it. Successive governments have put education at the top of their agenda and made changes in order to evidence success. It could be argued though that the changes have led to an increasingly skills-based curriculum for the children in our schools.

In this chapter we will explore the areas of talk, reading, and writing to show how schools can develop inspiring learning opportunities based on principled pedagogy which permeate across the school to create meaningful learning experiences for the children. We start by exploring the spoken voice, introducing the practice at St Thomas a Becket Primary School before turning to look at how a love of reading can be developed through the case study of Ealdham Primary School. Finally, we focus on writing and how writing for meaning can create a desire to write for both children and teachers.

The spoken voice

Talking about what you are doing, in order to understand and learn, has been considered an important and effective part of good classroom practice for a very long time. As a primary pupil in the 60's, the expectation was to talk not only about what we were doing as we worked, discussing and justifying our thoughts and ideas in our groups, but also to be able to organise and present our work to others in the class and wider school community.

From the Bullock Report (DES, 1975), through the work of Douglas Barnes and the Hackney Link project (1991) to the work of Robin Alexander (2010), talk has been researched and proven invaluable to children's development and understanding. Indeed, included in the national curriculum of 1990 was a whole section on speaking and listening, heightening the profile of talk even further. In the new national curriculum (2014) this was changed to 'spoken voice', offering statutory criteria across the primary phases. Although this is still centrally important to every primary school teacher, it could be argued that, in the current standards-led and accountability culture, finding space and time to ensure the pedagogy of talk is embedded in classroom practice is becoming more challenging.

Within this section I will present a case study from St Thomas a Becket Primary School to celebrate how they ensure that talk is central to teaching and learning. I present the case study from an observer's point of view, having had the privilege of visiting the school and seeing how talk was embedded in the school from the Early Years to Year 6.

During my time visiting St Thomas a Becket it was clear that there was a determination to create a culture and practice throughout the school, to not only use effectively in the classroom, but to ensure that, as the children progressed through the school, the skills needed to make talk for learning successful were developed. This was evident from the Headteacher, Bernie Greally, who told me that she sees talk as 'one of the most complex areas for children to develop'. She is determined that from the moment the children enter the school they are 'allowed' to talk and have effective role models to develop the confidence and skills that lead to success. In addition the Deputy Headteacher, Jo Cooper, said that the inclusion of role play, Drama, and storytelling over many years, as well as the use of structured spoken word games and talk partners, group collaboration, class discussions, and debates, has built a philosophy within the school that has become part of their culture and practice.

The case study below documents my reflections as I visited classes in Early Years, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 2.

Case study on St Thomas a Becket Primary School: Early Years and Key Stage 1

In the Early Years, I observed that within the free flow environment, the adults were listening carefully all the time. It was almost a physical thing – eye contact, a tilt of the head or a nod, a smile of reassurance – an action actually signalling to others around that they were listening to what one child was saying. This informal practice was constantly taking place throughout both the inside and outside areas. The Early Years co-ordinator told me that the children do not need to be asked to talk, in fact stopping them is sometimes near impossible! However, the adults listen and monitor how the talk is being used, scaffolding and modelling, asking questions and clarifying in order for the use of talk to be effective and focused on learning.

When the children came together for more focused activity such as fruit-time discussion, games, story, etc., the talking was more structured. However, I saw the children being asked to notice how things were said and why and how that might help them know what was going to happen, or what they thought about it. Talk itself was being talked about and modelled. All children in the Early Years were involved in singing, rhymes, dancing, shouting, explaining, and describing. All were building vocabulary, as well as understanding that what they say is important and interesting.

The Deputy Headteacher told me that as children move into Key Stage 1 the experience in the Foundation Stage, of talking being an important and taught part of the learning process, is built upon. The skills are described and discussed more directly, and the children begin to understand why they are asked to talk about their learning.

In the Year 2 class, I observed the teacher giving the children many opportunities to talk for a range of reasons and situations. The feedback written in their books from the previous lesson was read and shared with a friend, while the teacher, Emma Taylor, had conversations about the comments with several individuals. The talking opportunities were short; Emma told them how long they had, reiterated the focus and the purpose while she praised them for the skills they were using, reminding them of the skills they were using. Throughout the lesson she told the children why she was asking them to talk about things, reminding them of the purpose of the discussions.

The children in Year 2 knew how talk partners worked, but more than that, it appeared that many of them knew why the talking helped them. There was mighty enthusiasm for contributing to the feedback, many of them using statements like 'I thought that … but' or 'when he told me that, I didn't think the same'. I could hear some of the games and discussions I had observed in the Early Years class being used here. They were obviously beginning to consider the process of learning through talking, as well as just saying something themselves.

Both the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher were passionate when we talked about the developmental journey that the children take at St Thomas a Becket. They are determined that talk is used across the whole curriculum, emphasising that, as a staff, they were continually considering the role talking plays in the wider curriculum, moving on from the routine of talk partners, to make the discussion part of the learning

process valuable. They talked about the skills and understanding that children need to develop not only about what kind of talking to do, but also how it helps understanding.

From this case study you may wish to consider what skills Emma, the Year 2 teacher, was praising the children for when they were speaking with their talk partners. Also, you may want to question when was the last time you really listened to what a child was saying to you, and was able to extend their thinking through the conversation you shared.

The development of talk and the centrality of it in the Early Years and Key Stage 1 is crucial. The passion of individual teachers supported and exemplified by the senior leaders in a school is paramount to ensuring genuine conversations take place. At St Thomas a Becket Primary School it was clear that teachers were developing language though creating a stimulating environment and through giving the children opportunities to imitate (Skinner, 1957) the language they were hearing.

Language was used as a tool for learning (Vygotsky, 1962) where adults would ensure they talked about the importance of talk with the children in order to encourage them to have a metacognitive awareness of what they were engaged in. Language was not dumbed down but instead used in a way to expose the children to more complex patterns of language as it was recognised that the children could understand a greater range of language then they could use themselves (Bruner, 1986).

One of the most striking aspects of the talk taking place was the personal and genuine nature of it. The teachers were truly intrigued and immersed in the conversations they were having, and meaningful exchanges were taking place (Bearne and Reedy, 2018). Teachers listened to children, spoke with them, and extended their thinking through the conversations they had. There was no sense of teachers having to 'tick off' objectives, meet a certain number of conversations with each child or dig for specific vocabulary. It was greater and more meaningful than this – it was real.

Case study on St Thomas a Becket Primary School: Key Stage 1

In the Year 3 class I observed class teacher Faye Pellatt, introducing the lesson with clear instructions and reminders. The importance of talk was made explicit. I saw the children put into action talking to each other successfully in such a variety of ways. There was a lot of talking to each other, out loud and individually to the adults throughout the lesson. The room was filled with the quiet hum of thinking and learning. I didn't once see a child off task, but I did see children discussing their work and asking each other questions for help and clarification. These children knew they were allowed to talk, even when not specifically given a talking task, and they were using expression and consideration to learn about the focus.

Faye was a role model throughout. Her interest, enthusiasm, and expressive responses included almost no managerial language. She refocused individuals or

groups by questioning, responding to what she had seen or heard (and she obviously knew where to focus and on what, as she was there at the moments she needed to be, with intervention and support). She occasionally addressed the class as a whole to remind them of their tasks: 'Remember you are talking to each other as you work to explain the method you are trying out, to help each other and to see if you can learn more about division today'.

The end of the lesson, on the carpet, wasn't just a plenary about the subject area, but included reference to how their learning was supported by each other and the resources they used, and they were encouraged and helped to reflect upon new skills and ideas.

Faye believes that letting the children talk through ideas and sharing, supporting each other, builds on their previous understanding. She told me that the school allows a teacher to be creative in planning and teaching, but that the support she has been given has let her develop the use of talk how and when she feels it's right and appropriate for the class. Faye feels that their attitude to and engagement with lessons that include talk is very high and continually challenges them by asking questions that make them consider and reflect on the way they learn best.

I made the decision to observe the year groups in order, so I began in Early Years and moved through the school. By the time I entered the Year 5 classroom, I felt I had already seen the progression in the use of talk that Jo Cooper and I had discussed when she spoke about the aims and philosophy of the school. But it was indeed a delight to watch a class of children genuinely appear to have ownership of their learning. This was evident through the way they understood what was expected of them when asked to discuss something, but also how they applied the experience to the tasks they were carrying out. Certainly, the children observed in Year 5 were using their talking in a more mature way than the younger children. It had developed and they appeared very aware of how to talk to support learning and why they were doing it.

The evidence from my observations seems to show a development in modelling and skills, teaching and expectation, based on the school's philosophy reading the importance of talk. There was a culture that encouraged teachers and pupils to reflect upon, not only what learning is, but how it happens successfully.

Siobhan McKiernan, the Year 5 teacher approached the lesson as a learner alongside the children. This was a joint affair. The whole class – adults and children alike – was a group of people completely engaged and engrossed in their focus. There was an atmosphere of a workshop; I could feel the learning going on. There was almost no point when they weren't discussing and putting forward ideas and suggestions. As a visitor, I too was included; the children were keen to share their findings and ideas, to ask for opinions and advice. I heard one group compare the work to something done the previous week. They reflected on how this was the next part of their learning, how now they knew more and understood it better. I didn't ask any questions I didn't need to; as I walked past groups excitedly shared what they were doing.

The sense of achievement was tangible, they were very proud of their work. Siobhan told me that: 'The use of talking partners, shared discussion, and verbal feedback from both peers and teachers is so important in a classroom setting as it gives the learner an opportunity to scaffold their ideas and sequence their thoughts'. She feels that:

> It is extremely beneficial in supporting and developing the learner's investigative skills. Giving the learner an opportunity to discuss ideas with friends and create shared conclusions, in my experience, helps to produce more confident and fluent written work as well.

Reflecting on talk

Through my time at St Thomas a Becket Primary School I was privileged to see how talk developed throughout the school, underpinned by the knowledge and understanding of the senior leaders who ensured talk had prominence and permutated all aspects of school life. All staff understood the complex nature of talk and that it could not be reduced down in any way to a target sheet or set of criteria to evidence. The talk was 'in action' throughout every class, with teachers skillfully navigating their way, scaffolding and modelling talk between themselves as adults and with the children.

Research by Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) identified that the most common type of teacher–pupil interaction was the pattern of Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) where teachers are looking for the 'correct' answer to their question and once it is given will move on to another question or aspect of the lesson. At St Thomas a Becket Primary School I could identify a greater range of teaching talk taking place. Alexander (2008) identified five aspects of teaching talk as outlined below. He noted that it was the discussion and scaffolded dialogue where most learning would take place.

- **Rote** (teacher–class): The drilling of facts, ideas, and routines through constant repetition.
- **Recitation** (teacher–class or teacher–group): The accumulation of knowledge and understanding through questions designed to test or stimulate recall of what had been previously encountered, or cue pupils to work out the answer from clues provided in the question.
- **Instruction/exposition** (teacher–class, teacher–group, or teacher–individual): Telling pupils what to do, and/or imparting information, and/or explaining facts, principles, or procedures.
- **Discussion** (teacher–class, teacher–group, or pupil–pupil): The exchange of ideas with a view to sharing information and solving problems.
- **Scaffolded dialogue** (teacher–class, teacher–group, teacher–individual, or pupil–pupil): Achieving common understanding through structured and cumulative questioning and discussion which guide and prompt, reduce choices, minimise risk and error, and expedite 'handover' of concepts and principles. There may, or may not, be a right answer but justification and explanation are sought. Pupils' thinking is challenged and so understanding

> is enhanced. The teacher is likely to share several exchanges with a particular child several times in order to move the thinking on.
>
> (Alexander, 2008: 30)

With the knowledge and understanding from the senior leadership team and the principled approach taken at St Thomas a Becket Primary School it was clear to me that children were immersed in a talk environment which was stimulating, motivating, and enriching. Talk underpinned every aspect of the school with a prominence of discussion and scaffolded dialogue leading the teacher talk.

Reading

Learning to read is one of the most important, if not *the* most important learning activity that children will engage with during their first years of school. Primary schools, and more specifically teachers, play a fundamental role in developing children's abilities to read effectively for a whole range of purposes. However, controversy about teaching reading has a long-standing history and causes much confusion for teachers, educators, parents, and student teachers alike. Written almost 50 years ago, the Bullock Report (DES, 1975:77) is a reminder that 'there is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key to the process of reading'. Now, more than ever, reading is dependent on the context – e.g. reading on a screen or paper – the experiences of the reader, and the communities in which reading takes place (Bearne and Reedy, 2018).

For the vast majority of us, reading has become an automatic process. Before leaving our homes in the morning our brains have read thousands of messages in the form of pictures, signs, symbols, posts on screens, emails, WhatsApp messages, books, newspapers, headlines, magazines … the list goes on. It is fair to say that reading is an essential part of our everyday lives and it is a skill we need in order to exist. But reading is so much more than this. Reading has the power to transport us to fictitious worlds, it allows us to imagine beyond our own existence, and it helps us form connections with imaginary characters, places, and ideas. If nurtured in the correct way, reading can be irresistible, highly addictive, and wonderfully liberating.

Sadly, for some, reading is none of the above and the thought of picking up a book or reading something on a screen fills some with a surge of overwhelming anxiety. Much of the academic research carried out into reading has explored the most effective ways, and preferred strategies, to teach reading. Bearne and Reedy (2018) have helpfully divided these strategies into two categories, learning to read and becoming a reader. *Learning* to read is about getting the words off the page, this is called decoding. For some this will come first, whereas for others, meaning will come first, with the preference to understand what a word means and then decode it. Whereas *becoming* a reader is about supporting young readers in developing a repertoire of reading behaviours, encouraging them to develop autonomy, choice, and agency in their selection of reading material, and helping them carve a reading identity. This approach is all about laying the foundations both in school and outside of school, so that children see the benefits that can be gained from a lifelong commitment to reading. And it is the teacher who has a fundamental role in nurturing this commitment to reading.

There are many different viewpoints on reading development, and we would strongly encourage you to explore these perspectives so that you can begin to see where your values as a reading teacher lie. The following is not an exhaustive list for you to aimlessly research, rather the perspectives are suggestions for you to dip in and out of within your own personal study:

- Skills and drills
- Cognitive-Psychological view
- Psycholinguistic view
- The Simple View of Reading
- Socio-political perspective
- Sociocultural view

Critical question

What perspective(s) do you take your values around reading from?

For the remainder of this section on reading, a sociocultural view will be taken. It is here where we turn to the work of Cremin et al., (2014) who have published prolific research into reading for pleasure. Findings from this fascinating study reveal that international policy seems to have emphasised the skills needed for reading, rather than children's engagement, motivation, and dedication to reading (that is 'learning to read', rather than 'becoming a reader'). If schools want to develop children as lifelong readers, they must ensure that their teaching incorporates strategies which promote the skill, but most importantly the will to read. Through the creation of a supportive classroom reading community, a reading for pleasure agenda, where children can learn to become readers, can be achieved. Such a community is most effective when it is led by a reading teacher – that is a teacher who reads, and a reader who teaches. Having reviewed literature around reading for pleasure, Bearne and Reedy (2018) and Wyse et al., (2018), suggest that in order for children to develop a love of reading, they need exposure to:

- Social reading environments (reading is not an act that is carried out in silence or isolation)
- High-quality books being read aloud to them (books that will offer them pleasure, not books that are designed for skills-based literacy teaching)
- Creative opportunities to explore books (e.g. through Drama and role play as this will help them gain a better understanding of the content and theme of a book)
- Informal book talk, inside text talk, and recommendations (a chance to pour over a book and have a good blather about it)

To help the reader understand how the above four points can be put into practice within the primary classroom, attention will now be given to a case study which explores the way

in which a South East London primary school has used one book to promote reading across the school.

Background to the case study school

Ealdham Primary, is a two-form entry inner London school that is situated on the cusp of a deprived area of London and has a significantly high proportion of children receiving pupil premium, as well as a large majority of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The teachers at Ealdham have always been aware of the vital necessity to model and encourage reading in the most positive ways possible. Although reading was valued, discussions amongst the staff team revealed that they needed to develop the way in which they promoted and taught reading to their children. Together with a combination of reading initiatives, a project named 'One School – One Book' was introduced across all year groups. This project required all teachers from Nursery through to Year 6 to use the book *Malala's Magic Pencil* by Malala Yousafzai to produce a whole class written and artistic response that could be displayed across the school. Unlike other case studies that you will read in this book, the following case study does not focus on one or two particular professionals, rather it brings together the reflections of a number of teachers. This is because the case study is reporting on a whole school approach that involved all members of teaching staff and showcases how they had complete control over the work that was produced and were often led by the children's voices and their interests.

Case Study on 'One School – One Book', changing the way reading is promoted and taught across the school

At the end of the summer term headteacher Christian York read aloud *Malala's Magic Pencil* to all members of staff. When asked why he did this, he explained:

> I wanted to share my interpretation, but also it was important that the staff had the opportunity to sit back and really listen to the story without distractions. My staff team love being read to! By doing this, it meant that everyone was familiar with the story when they returned to it to plan their work.

The teachers were each given their own copy of the book to take home over the summer. During this time, they had the freedom to plan their own learning outcomes, objectives, and activities, without fear of judgement. When asked to share their views on this process, words like 'liberating', 'exciting', 'fun', and 'insightful' were often used. One Year 3 teacher reported:

> It was exciting, as it allowed me to tailor the lessons for the children and create a sequence of lessons that would spark their imagination and interest.

By taking the book home and reading it several times, the teachers became readers, and in doing so gained a deeper insight into the book. One Year 6 teacher went on to


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