

Review - Using talk effectively in the primary classroom

by Richard Eke and John Lee, London, Routledge, 2008, 144 pp.; ISBN 978-0-415-34281-0

This accessible social-constructivist perspective on Using talk effectively in the primary classroom is clearly structured, consisting of two sections. Initially, the book provides context, rationale and an articulation of the authors' position, whilst the second section draws on the authors' own research to provide ways in which primary student teachers and teachers might use and develop talk across some primary curriculum subjects in their practice.

The first part of the book contains four chapters. The first discusses pre-school language acquisition. This is helpful, but disappointingly not interrogated in great depth. It is surprising that neither the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (DfES 2007; DCFS 2008) nor Bercow (2008) are cited in this context. That Eke and Lee do not cite the latter (2008) may explain their claim that "Nearly all children come to school as effective talkers" (3), which is debatable when one considers much of the recent empirical research evidence informing Bercow (2008). Discussion of the challenges teachers and children meet when children enter primary school with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) or English as an additional language would have enhanced this chapter. The second chapter focuses on rationalising talk in whole class teaching, but again, more recent studies are not addressed. Chapter three makes some attempt to do this in discussing the potential mono-experience of many children in England resulting from government prescription. The reader is also prepared for chapter four, which considers how teachers might address the needs of most children. This chapter is a clear exposition of the authors' view that dialogic talk is a key medium for scaffolding learning. Allusion made to the contributions of Mercer and Alexander to the field seems wholly appropriate here.

The second section begins with an overview stating English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education are its focus. The rationale for this decision, set in the context of a national curriculum which statutorily "requires that all maintained schools provide a balanced and broadly based curriculum" (DfEE and QCA 1999, 12) is not strongly argued; rather it endorses weaknesses in the current system. Given the prevailing discourse at the time of the book's publication, portentous of changes to the primary national curriculum, the second section lacks curriculum breadth. It is therefore surprising to read on its back cover that this book is a "balanced view of whole class teaching".

Each of the first five chapters in part two addresses one subject and the section ends with two chapters focused on the issue of "Responding to individual need in whole class teaching" and concluding comments. The subject-focused chapters follow a coherent structure likely to prove helpful for busy primary teachers and student teachers. Given the pace of change in education in England, it is unsurprising that Eke and Lee's research already seems a little outdated, for example, as they suggest themselves, it is not located within the combined Primary National Strategy framework. Despite this, useful points emerge from real world examples of classroom practice, several of which are likely to stand the test of time.

Chapter 10 deals with how primary teachers might respond to learners' individual needs. By deconstructing some of the key expectations of primary teachers relating to accommodating

individual learning needs, this is likely to prove particularly useful to the inexperienced teacher faced with a class of 30 children.

The “Lessons to be learnt” sections in part two provide succinct summaries for those times when educators may be pressed for time! Research demonstrably intertwined with practice is a very positive feature of this section. Many of the activity boxes included throughout the book are likely to prove useful for student teachers and teachers wishing to further develop their pedagogical subject knowledge as well as subject skills in those subjects covered. These chapters may also make useful reading for more experienced colleagues conducting classroom observations.

In *Using talk effectively in the primary classroom*, Eke and Lee provide a well structured account of how primary teachers might use talk to develop their teaching in some areas. That their suggestions are based on their own empirical research is commendable. However, much of the literature drawn on lacks a contemporary perspective and the narrowness of focus is disappointing.