Praise for mentor teachers who inspire learning and creativity

Professional experience is a crucial and highly valued component of pre-service teacher education. It is a requirement that each pre-service teacher education program submitted to the Teachers Registration Board for approval includes a specified amount of supervised professional experience.

Teachers and pre-service teacher education students agree that professional experience opportunities in which students enjoy the support and guidance of mentor teachers are vital to students’ development.

Ester Milter, a teacher at Heathfield Primary School, says she is passionate about mentoring pre-service teacher education students.

“I was fortunate to have a brilliant mentor so I wanted to give something back by mentoring pre-service students.”

“It is a rewarding experience for us all to be involved in a mentoring relationship; the pre-service teacher education student, my pupils and me; we all learn from one another.”

Mentoring is rewarding, energising, and inspiring...

...continued on page 6...
As a member of the Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA), the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia is actively involved in a number of initiatives at a national level. In particular we have seen the proposal to transform the organization Teaching Australia into the Australian Institute for Teaching, Schools and Leadership (AITS), with responsibility for some areas in which ATRA has had an interest and has actively participated over a number of years. These initiatives include the further development of national standards across a number of levels, the promotion of a national accreditation system for pre-service teacher education, the development of quality teacher practicum and nationally consistent registration. ATRA will continue to be involved in such matters with membership on various specialist sub-committees of the new Institute as it develops its policy and programs.

At an international level the third International Teaching Conference was held in Cardiff in June 2009. This organization has grown rapidly since its inaugural meeting in 2005. There have been like teaching Councils in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and South Africa for many years, however Councils in Nigeria and Jamaica have been recently established. A level of interest in establishing similar organizations was shown by countries in Europe (where English is not the first language) with a presence from the Netherlands and from the European Network of Education Councils. As a result of the meeting, progress was made on the development of a website (with the name www.iftra.org reserved), the development of comparative tables of qualifications for entry to the profession as a registered teacher, the sharing of information in relation to processes used to inquire into allegations of unprofessional conduct, the establishment of a network to access professional research undertaken by the various Councils and consideration of a Charter for Teaching Councils. The Board has a lead role in co-ordinating some of this work before the organization meets again in 2011.

On the local front 2009 has been a year of consolidation. There are now several types of hearings undertaken by the Board including conduct, professional and incapacity matters and admissions for entry and renewal of registration. An increase in hearings means a corresponding need to call on members’ time and expertise more often. A high level of commitment is required.

Over the last three years the Board has consulted widely on professional standards for entry to the Register, change of status and renewal of registration. Policies and procedures relating to the implementation of requirements for renewal of registration are currently being developed.

There have been no changes to the membership of the Board since the last newsletter and this stability has contributed to the efficiency of operations in the first year of a new term of Board membership.

I thank all members of the Board, the Registrar and the staff of the secretariat for their commitment to the work of the Board during 2009.

On behalf of the Board I extend the compliments of the season to all registrants and wish them safe and rewarding holidays.

Carmel Kerin
Presiding Member

The Teachers Registration Board of South Australia (right)

Back Row:
Lee Dühring
(Deputy - Jenny Hocking)
Carmel Kerin
(Presiding Member)
Lyn Castle

Middle Row:
Chris Allen
(Deputy - Margaret Kelly)
Ann Bliss
Roger Anderson
Peter Ryan
Jackie Bone-George

Front Row:
Larry Owens
Bob Woodbury
Gerry Mulhearn
Helen O’Brien
Michael Papps
Keith Parkinson

Absent:
Jenny Hocking
Barry Thompson
Julie Lundberg
Margaret Kelly
The Teachers Registration Board has supported the Annual Conference of the Australia New Zealand Law Association (ANZELA) over many years. In September 2009 I attended the 18th Annual Conference titled “Education: a risky business?”

At the end of the two days, I was convinced that the title didn’t need a question mark and that education was indeed a risky business.

Issues raised included:

- The legal, ethical and professional challenges surrounding teachers’ use of social networking sites such as MySpace, Twitter and Facebook
- The ongoing vulnerability of teachers to allegations, which may be decades old
- Workplace bullying of teachers
- Common teacher injuries and illnesses.

They were sobering and very real topics for our profession often accompanied by actual examples of litigation, allegation and heartbeat.

One session focused on the use by teachers of social networking sites. Cases from the UK and the USA were explored. Teachers and student teachers had posted personal opinions about schools, students and colleagues in the belief that their comments were private and available only to people they had invited to be their “friend”. It was argued that there should be a right to privacy. It was also argued that nothing is private if we voluntarily post it on the Internet. We were told to expect that such sites can be readily accessed and could be used as evidence in court. Some teachers allowed students and their parents to access their sites, a practice which we were advised to avoid.

After two days of thought provoking and challenging issues I was looking for some positive news. The Honourable Marilyn Warren A.C. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria assured the delegates that although our profession does indeed seem a risky one, it requires the dedication and commitment of great teachers. An interesting theory came from Jason Clarke, the facilitator who hypothesised that maybe education is like a game of snakes and ladders. He said that there were “lots of snakes but if you knew where they were, you could avoid them and find the ladders”. I held that thought, reassured just a little and determined to discuss the “snakes” with my colleagues. The ladders are everywhere.

Jenny Hocking
Board Member

Nazareth Catholic Community

Nazareth Catholic Community, with campuses at Findon and Flinders Park “is a community for families, growing in faith and vitality, and sharing faith and vitality through a range of Church and Integrated Services”. The Findon Campus is home to the Early Childhood Centre (children participating from 6 months to 6 years) and primary years.

On 29 May 2009 the monthly board meeting of the Teachers Registration Board was held at Nazareth Catholic Community – Findon Campus.

Board members appreciate the opportunity to visit education sites and meet teachers, staff, children and students and thank Nazareth Catholic Community for the invitation to visit the Findon campus. Information relating to the Nazareth Catholic Community can be found at www.nazareth.org.au

Above: Presiding Member and Michael Dahl, Director - Nazareth Catholic Community
Qualifications

Check the qualifications listed on your current certificate or application for renewal of registration form.

If an alteration or update is required, send a certified copy of the official academic transcripts from the university (or equivalent) and we will update your qualifications on the Register and forward a new Certificate of Registration to you at no cost.

‘Teachers inspire learning and creativity’

“Everyday, our children and students are inspired … Their inspiration is right in front of them…” (Advertiser Newspaper, 30 October 2009, Teachers Registration Board advertisement)

Teachers assist the 258,000 South Australian children and students to develop understandings about the world by inspiring learning and creativity in diverse ways. Everyday, our children and students are inspired to create works of art, solve complex problems and are guided in their learning by our world class teachers.

World Teachers’ Day, celebrated on 30 October, provided an opportunity for the community to acknowledge the work of over 35,000 registered teachers who inspire learning and creativity.

To promote and celebrate World Teachers’ Day within South Australia the Board placed an advertisement in the Adelaide Advertiser.

The Board would like to thank the teachers of South Australia for the work they do to inspire learning and creativity in their children and students.

Assessment of Overseas Qualifications

During the period 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009 there were a total of 233 applications for assessment of overseas qualifications.

Of these, 193 were assessed as meeting the qualification requirements for registration as a teacher and 40 were refused. Some qualifications were refused as they were not comparable to Australian four-year qualifications, while others were refused as they did not contain enough studies in teacher education or supervised teaching practice.

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If you would like to read more, visit the World Teachers’ Day section of our website at www.trb.sa.edu.au
What's Happening Nationally for Early Childhood?

The national agenda for early childhood focuses on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated early childhood education and child care. The agenda has a strong emphasis on connecting with schools to ensure all Australian children participate successfully in early learning for life long outcomes.

The Australian Government is working closely with state and territory governments, key child care and early learning stakeholders and families to implement its policy agenda which includes:

- Indigenous Children
  Providing a solid start in school
  Indigenous Preschools
  Children & Family Centres
  Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership

- National Early Childhood Development Strategy

- Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

- Quality Agenda
  Quality Standards
  Quality Rating System
  Streamlined Regulatory Approach
  Early Years Learning Framework which provides broad direction for early childhood educators in all early childhood education and care settings (birth – age 5 and transition to school) to facilitate children’s learning.

- Early Childhood Workforce
  National Early Years Workforce Strategy
  HECS/HELP Benefit
  Removal of TAFE fees
  Additional University Places
  Innovative early childhood workforce projects

- Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

- Universal Access to a quality early childhood education program by 2013. These programs will be delivered in a diversity of settings by a university trained early childhood teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year in the year before formal schooling.

For more information refer to the website of Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) at http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood

Thank you to Gerry Mulhearn (Board member) for providing the information relating to the National Early Childhood Initiatives.
The extracts below are from interviews conducted with mentor teachers and pre-service teacher education students. More mentoring stories will be available on the Teachers Registration Board website at www.trb.sa.edu.au in 2010.

Kathryn Jarvis, (Flinders University) the pre-service student with whom Ester worked nominated Ester as an inspiring mentor teacher.

“When I started my teaching practice I was very nervous and wasn’t sure how I would go… I feel I was very lucky to have a mentor who was so supportive, encouraging and willing to give positive and constructive feedback. Ester was so positive about having a student teacher because she felt that she would be able to benefit and learn from the experience – this made me feel valued and respected.”

“Ester taught me a lot about the actual job of teaching and all that it involves… all the things they never mention at university. I developed a much greater respect for teachers and all of the work they do… and I learnt how rewarding and fun teaching can be.”

What Karen Rowe (Flinders University) appreciated most about working with her mentors Patrick Penfold and Karen Inwood at St John’s Grammar School was the opportunity and the relationships formed.

Above: Kathryn Jarvis

Karen says she values the chance to continue to work with her mentors. “Based on my experience I am encouraged to mentor others once out in the field.”

Patrick Penfold is motivated to mentor pre-service teacher education students to promote teaching and learning because throughout his teaching career he has received a lot of help and inspiration from many teachers.

“It is nice to be able to communicate those insights and pass on those ‘tricks of the trade’…. Pre-service education students in the arts usually arrive full of creative ideas, enthusiasm and a fresh approach…. it is a matter of challenging and supporting the pre-service student to focus those artistic skills to provide educational opportunities for students.”

According to Karen Inwood, “When you come out of University you have theory but not the insight into the practice of teaching. The most important aspect is the practice teaching so it is important to give the pre-service student a quality experience by giving them structure and a proper ‘hands on’ experience… I give them the “floor” which enables them to take a risk… it gives me a period of reflecting on my own practice too.”

Karen concludes, “Mentoring is a wonderful experience in which the benefits far outweigh any challenges…. friendships and mentoring relationships can continue after the practice experience finishes. Everyone should give it a go.”

Janelle Colville, a teacher at Our Lady of The Sacred Heart College has been teaching for three years. Janelle sees mentoring as a way to improve the professionalism of teachers. Janelle explains data shows that many teachers leave the profession within the first five years. She believes, “The mentoring process helps students to have a more solid foundation which helps them to stay in teaching… The educational theory taught at university needs to be balanced with the practical side of teaching… the pre-service experience enables the students to be more comfortable and learn the practical aspects of teaching.”
Praise for mentor teachers who inspire learning and creativity

“I want students to succeed and to have the opportunity to teach the class as if they are the teacher… it is important to develop open communication - a strong mentoring relationship equals a shared vision.”

Central to the education of our next generation of teachers are the professional experience opportunities pre-service teacher education students have to put into practice their theoretical learning. Under the mentorship of South Australian registered teachers, pre-service teacher education students are supported to develop their teaching abilities, their professional relationships, knowledge and practice.

Approval of Pre-service Teacher Education Programs

The Teachers Registration Board has legislative responsibility for the registration of all teachers in South Australia. South Australian pre-service teacher education programs must be approved by the Board. Graduates who successfully complete an approved pre-service teacher education program are eligible for provisional registration as a teacher, subject to meeting all other registration requirements.

In the 2007 newsletter, the Board provided information about the comprehensive consultation process in which the Board conferred and collaborated with the four providers of pre-service teacher education in South Australia namely; the University of Adelaide, The University of South Australia, Flinders University and Tabor Adelaide to develop new program approval guidelines. The guidelines have been developed within a broader national context and align with pre-service teacher education guidelines developed by other members of the Australian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA) in Australia and New Zealand. The new Pre-service Teacher Education Program Approval Guidelines were approved in 2007 and implemented in November 2008.

Responsibility for determining the appropriateness of the program(s) for registration purposes lies with the Teachers Registration Board. A Standing Committee convened by the Board has delegated responsibility for assessing the program(s) and making recommendations to the Board. The guidelines provide a framework to assist the development and structure of programs and are used by the Standing Committee as the basis for approval of programs.

Once the Board is notified of the development of a new program(s) or the review of an existing program a Standing Committee is convened by the Board. The pre-service teacher education provider(s) forward formal documentation to the Standing Committee that clearly indicates how the program(s) meets all requirements including the Professional Teaching Standards for Registration in South Australia. The Standing Committee assesses the program(s) and then a recommendation is made to the Board for consideration at a monthly Board meeting.

The new guidelines were used for the first time in November and December 2008 in relation to programs submitted by the University of South Australia and the University of Adelaide. The Board assessed and approved thirteen programs.

Once approved, the program(s) is added to the list of programs published on the TRB website and in the Annual Report. The program is also advertised in the SATAC University Guide as having professional recognition that the academic qualification awarded will allow a graduate to apply for Teacher Registration in South Australia, interstate and in some overseas countries.

Above: Janelle Colville
The conference entitled Primary Pedagogies for the Future provided opportunities for educators to come together to push the boundaries and consider new and creative ways for meeting the challenges of maximizing outcomes and opportunities for primary years’ students and teachers.

“Our impressive line up of keynotes, lead speakers and workshop presenters will take you on a journey that will challenge, stimulate, question, inspire and connect you to think differently, creatively and envision new possibilities for teaching and learning in our primary schools.” (Sue Zecchin, President of the Primary Years Teaching Association of South Australia – Welcome speech)

The Board was pleased to sponsor twenty primary years teachers to attend this inaugural event.

Following are a few of the insights shared by sponsored teachers with colleagues and with the Board:

“What a great experience! Listening to the keynote speakers alone was inspiring enough and confidence building as a classroom teacher in what is a stressful, busy, yet rewarding profession that we call teaching.” Tricia

“John Loughran gave an inspiring and motivational talk on valuing teachers’ skills… John’s talk itself was an excellent example of teaching pedagogy. He kept the audience entertained, stimulated, inspired and we all managed to learn something rather than just be talked at.” Matt

“The challenge for all who attended (the conference) is to now create the changes that will connect us with our students for best possible results, not just ‘grades’ but the real challenge is to create a learner who is connected with their world, in their relationships and their work.” Natalie

Sponsored teachers in alphabetic order: Trina Barwa, Jo-Anne Campbell, Leanne Costello, Tricia Coulthard, Leah Dowdell, Natalie Emberton, Elise Fuller, David Hankinson, Katherine Harrold, Angela Harvie, Ginny Langton, Sheryl Mickan, Shana Morgan, Catherine O’Neil, Matt Pastro, Christine Prior, Pru Rigggs, Sandy Stefanou, John Trobbiani, Kathy Turley

Conduct Inquiries

The Board may on Complaint of the Registrar, or of its own motion, hold an inquiry in order to determine whether the conduct of a registered teacher (or formerly registered teacher) is unprofessional and whether such conduct may constitute proper cause for disciplinary action.

- One registered male teacher was reprimanded and had his registration suspended until further order for unprofessional conduct (being improper conduct) in not maintaining proper boundaries in relation to the teacher/student relationship to the detriment of particular students. The suspension was also subject to a condition that during the suspension the respondent complete a course of study addressing ethical and protective practices in relation to sexual harassment and appropriate boundaries in the teacher/student relationship.

- One registered female teacher had her registration as a teacher cancelled for unprofessional conduct (being incompetence) and as a result of the suspension of the registration by another teacher regulation authority (Victorian Institute of Teachers) as a teacher for a fixed period.

- One registered female teacher was reprimanded for unprofessional conduct (being improper conduct) involving failing to maintain appropriate boundaries in the teacher/student relationship and had a condition placed upon her registration that she completes further studies in Ethics in Education with particular reference to the maintaining of proper boundaries in the teacher/student relationship.

- One formerly registered teacher was disqualified from being registered as a teacher until further order for engaging in unprofessional conduct (being disgraceful and improper conduct) regarding a course of conduct involving the sale of cannabis.

- One formerly registered teacher was disqualified from being registered as a teacher permanently for unprofessional conduct (being disgraceful and improper conduct) involving indecent assault and unlawful sexual intercourse with a person under 17 years.

There were no appeals from decisions of the Board to the District Court in this reporting period.

Admissions Hearings

The Board held fifteen Admissions Hearings relating to new or formerly registered applicants, who did not hold the prescribed qualifications requirements nor the recent teaching experience as described under Board policy. In exercising discretionary powers, the Board made the following determinations:

Nine applicants for registration were granted provisional registration subject to a condition that they complete additional qualifications in order to meet the Board’s prescribed qualifications requirements.

Four applicants were refused registration for reasons relating to the adequacy of their qualifications and inability to comply with the Board’s policy on recency of teaching service.

Two applicants were granted Special Authorities as Unregistered Persons to Teach in specific subject areas.

In addition, there were eight applications to renew registration which raised concerns regarding the health of the applicant and his/her ability to continue to be a registered teacher. One of these matters was adjourned pending the provision of a medical report. The other seven matters all resulted in a grant of registration subject to conditions imposed in relation to the applicant’s particular restricted capacity.
In 2008 the Statutory Authorities Review Committee received a motion from the Legislative Council to inquire into the Teachers Registration Board.

The Terms of Reference are as follows:

1. The welfare and best interests of children as its primary consideration in the performance of its functions;

2. The manner and process by which it ensures that a teacher registration system and professional standards are maintained to safeguard the public interest in there being a teaching profession whose members are competent educators and fit and proper persons to have the care of children;

3. The composition of the Board;

4. The manner and process by which evidence is gathered and presented to the Board, including the representation of parties to proceedings;

5. The relationship between the Department of Education and Children’s Services and the Board; and

6. Any other relevant matters.

The Review Committee advertised the Inquiry in the Advertiser and Weekend Australian newspapers on Saturday 30 May 2009 and the Sunday Mail on Sunday 31 May 2009. The invitation for written submissions closed on Friday 31 July 2009. The Presiding Member and Registrar of the Teachers Registration Board were invited to address the Review Committee on 7 December 2009. It is anticipated the Review will continue in 2010.

The Research Digest is a periodic digest produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) for the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia in conjunction with other members of the Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA).

Each digest focuses on a topical issue. Digest Number 5 focuses on ‘dialogue in the classroom’. Six pages (of a total of seventeen) are published as part of the newsletter.

To read the full version of issue 5 and previous issues of the Research Digest, please visit our website at www.trb.sa.edu.au.
The Digest

Talking to learn: Dialogue in the classroom

This Digest is focused on research studies about using classroom talk for improving learning, and particularly on the use of teaching methods incorporating classroom dialogue. A selection of websites is listed and a full reference list provided. Links to those references for which full-text online access is freely available are also included.

Classrooms are full of talk; some commentators have even suggested that schools are 'saturated' with it. There are different types of classroom talk for a range of different purposes. An international research study conducted in primary classrooms in five countries (the ‘Five Nations Study’) has demonstrated the powerful learning effects of skilfully used ‘dialogic teaching’. This approach has been defined as classroom teaching where teachers and children both make substantial and significant contributions through which children's thinking on particular ideas and or themes is moved forward (Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

Another description of dialogic teaching identifies a number of aspects:
... collective, supportive and genuinely reciprocal; it uses carefully-structured extended exchanges to build understanding through cumulation; and throughout, children’s own words, ideas, speculations and arguments feature much more prominently (Alexander, 2005).
Early work on the vital role of language in development was conducted by the Russian education theorist, Vygotsky.

For Vygotsky, language is the medium by which children acquire more than information (Vygotsky, 1962). By participating in guided interactions with more experienced members, children also acquire the ‘mental tools’ of their culture. He observed that tools begin as social products but become the property of individuals by the process of internalisation. In the most conspicuous and significant example, language becomes thought.

There has been a great deal of recent interest in the biological bases of the human mind, particularly in brain-based learning. Vygotsky and those influenced by his work have shown that the human mind is also a cultural product: without the experience of growing up in a human culture, having a human brain will not result in a child reaching his or her potential. Difficulties experienced by children raised in extreme isolation from other people are examples of the necessity for social interaction for successful development.

Interactions with more experienced others are vital for children’s acquisition of the key mental tools of their culture. Working with an adult or more accomplished peer allows the child to internalise knowledge, ways of thinking and ways of doing. Guided participation in both learning activities and conversation about these activities help the child to not just acquire information but to learn how to use this information, to transform it and make it a part of his or her own mental tool kit.

‘Scaffolding’ is a widely used term to describe the process of supporting learning by a teacher, coach or more experienced peer. The teacher or coach builds a framework to guide the student’s own construction of the ideas, skills, concepts and/or processes being learned. Dialogue can be a key part of this process of ‘handing over’ knowledge and skills. As Game and Metcalfe note: Dialogue allows participants to have thoughts they could not have had on their own, yet to recognise these thoughts as developments of their own thinking (2009).
The transformation of shared language into private thought begins in infancy and children pass through a number of stages as they transform public talk to internal thought.

The use of ‘private speech’ is the key characteristic in one of these stages. Laura Berk (2006) observes:

As any parent, teacher, sitter or casual observer will notice, young children talk to themselves—sometimes as much or even more than they talk to other people. Depending on the situation, this private speech (as modern psychologists call the behaviour) can account for 20 to 60 percent of the remarks a child younger than 10 years makes. Many parents and educators misinterpret this chatter as a sign of disobedience, inattentiveness or even mental instability. In fact, private speech is an essential part of cognitive development for all children. Recognition of this fact should strongly influence how both normal children and children who have trouble learning are taught.

Berk’s research has confirmed Vygotsky’s theory that inner speech is one step in the process by which the social tool, language, becomes the private tool, thought. Young children listen to those around them and begin to ‘parrot’ the observations, instructions and explanations they hear as they take control of their own actions. ‘Thinking aloud’ is replaced by ‘internal speech’ and this in turn becomes the automatic internal dialogue we all recognise as ‘thinking’. By this method children learn their culture’s beliefs and values about knowledge, learning, how the human mind works and how to solve problems, as a few examples. The process certainly does not end in preschool, however, and children—and adults—continue to internalise the speech they hear as they move through school, acquiring knowledge and new ways of thinking, reasoning and interacting as they go.
Each of these strategies has a place in classrooms and is more effective for certain types of learning than others. Rote is an effective way to learn and practise the basic facts and skills on which higher order learning is based. Recitation provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate what has been learned and to reinforce that learning. Instruction or exposition is a means by which new knowledge, skills and procedures can be directly taught. However, none of these is a very efficient method for teaching key thinking skills.

The involvement of the teacher is a vital component of the dialogic technique

The latter two types of classroom talk – discussion and dialogue – were less commonly found during the Five Nations study but were considerably more common in classrooms in France and Russia than in India, the USA and England. Research suggests that these two techniques can be powerful tools for developing and extending students’ mental tool kit.

The purpose of increasing the amount of children’s talk in class involves more than simply allowing them to express an opinion, build their confidence or improve their communication skills. The aim of using dialogue in teaching is always to move the child’s thinking from his or her own conceptions towards well-formed and mature understanding of and ways of thinking and talking about issues and ideas. Alexander maintains that the evidence supports that dialogic teaching is most effective for the development of thinking skills:

The argument is amply justified by research evidence – psychological, neurological, pedagogical, linguistic – which shows that talk of a genuinely dialogic kind is indispensable to the development of thinking and understanding (Alexander, 2005).
Data from the Five Nations Study showed that teachers in whose classrooms dialogue was a noticeable feature tended to also emphasise a number of important aspects of student talk. These included expressiveness, volume and clarity; precision in vocabulary, grammar and syntax; and the development of the distinctive terminology of each subject area and of the appropriate ‘register’ – the spoken equivalent of writing genre. Whereas in many classrooms a more conversational or colloquial style was the norm, in classrooms where dialogic teaching was often utilised children had many opportunities to observe, learn and practise different and often more formal styles of talk.

While discussion or dialogue involves a relative decrease in the amount of teacher talk and increase in student talk, the involvement of the teacher is a vital component of the dialogic technique. Students are guided through the learning process by carefully crafted interactions, rather than left to discover – or not - important ideas, information, concepts and ways of interacting.

An important aspect of utilising discussion and dialogue is that children do not have to always be directly involved in these to benefit: watching another student participating in a dialogue with a teacher or a more knowledgeable peer has powerful positive effects on learning. This can partially be explained by hearing concepts and ideas expressed in the language of a peer but also seeing the process of discussing and understanding demonstrated helps the observer to internalise these tools and make them a part of his or her own mental tool kit. In addition, the student witnesses the giving of immediate and targeted feedback on the accuracy or appropriateness of ideas.
New Zealand researcher John Hattie (2009) has described the importance of timely targeted feedback for student learning. Feedback that helps a student to answer the important questions of ‘Where am I going?’; ‘How am I going?’ and ‘Where to next?’ has powerful positive effects on student learning. Timeliness is crucial: it is important to correct misunderstandings when they happen, rather than at some time afterwards, as can occur. Participating in or witnessing dialogues or discussions and receiving immediate feedback on accuracy - or otherwise - provides students with feedback before misapprehensions have a chance to become entrenched.

Hattie has also discussed the benefits of ‘making learning visible’. He has drawn attention to how these advantages are manifested in successful learning experiences that occur outside the classroom, for instance during programs of outdoor education. He observes that these programs are very effective in enhancing student learning.

Engaging in dialogue with students also provides teachers with vital feedback on the progress of learning. These experiences help problem solving skills and peer and cooperative learning, and there is an enhanced level of immediate feedback. A major reason for the success is the way the activities are structured to emphasise very challenging learning intentions, the success criteria are clear, the peer support optimised, and not only is feedback given throughout the program but it is actively sought by the participants (Hattie, 2009).

Discussion and dialogue bring some of these aspects into the classroom. Engaging in dialogue with students also provides teachers with vital feedback on the progress of learning.