

Beginner's talk (informal conversation) in classroom.

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This idea of using talk or dialogue in classroom is about to exploit the power of talk to shape children's thinking and secure their engagement, learning and understanding (Robin alexender,2008). We often study dialogue as an instrument to facilitate learning or teaching that is what dialogic teaching aims to do. Researchers suggest so many ways and formats to understand dialogue or conversation in classroom and especially in the context of teaching of a particular subject say social science or mathematics etc. This helps to explore or organize the potentials of dialogue in teaching any subject per se. This discussion, really a great help for students to indulge in dialogue and to shape their thinking and secure their encouragement. But here in this paper I want to highlight the talk /dialogue which are not subject centric, but which focuses on sharing personal experiences, day to day life of student in a classroom, a formal place. And it is also important for me to discuss this form of dialogue because in lower primary classroom where child is very new to school and have only perceptual knowledge to share (which is personal concrete experiences only) .

What is this form of conversation and how is it relevant for school and classroom? We will discuss this issue with the help of an example on conversation between me and Deepak a student of 2nd standard. Deepak was a student in this class in which I worked for one year with breaks in between.

Example -1

When class was over teacher(me) asked Deepak what he will do after reaching home ? Deepak said he will go to his farm, since it is irrigation period so there is some work in their farm. His father will sow 'Hola' (gram) this time in the field. He used Bundeli word *Hola* for gram.

T- What is Hola?

D- Sir , we eat it .Roast them and eat them. One day my father brought lots of hola (showing by expanding hands).

T- From where did he bring them? From the farm , from whose farm?

D- My uncle roasted them..

T-So you eat them, how it tastes?

D- Tasty!

T- When do we get them , in winter or in summer? (Teacher was not aware of what hola means so he was trying to understand what Deepak was , talking about, which crop is it?)

D- Any time.

T- Ok.

D-Everyone sow them in their field .

T- Ok everyone !

D- *Hoon*.(yes) In half of the field they sow rice, pulse and soybean!

T- So when you will harvest soybean?

D- Half is harvested.

T-When did you sow that?

D- Long back, we bought (he used the word *liya* mean taking from some one but here teacher is not clear whether it is used for purchasing or for taking on contract) the land.

T- Oh , you bought it ,from whom?

D-We gave lots of money.

T- Ok, when?

D- Long back.

T- Is it your farm or are you doing it on contract basis?

D-*Hoon* ..(His answer did not gives clear understanding of whether it was on their own farm or they were using it on contract basis)

T- Is it your farm or you you doing it on contract basis (teacher again asked for clarification)?

D- Yes sir, when my Mukku *jiji* died since then we are cultivating this land.

T- Who was Mukku *jiji* ?

D- She used to live in front of our house.

T- In front of your house?

D- Yes , she always used to come and eat in our house.

T- How old she was?

D-That old, raising his hand (but he was referring to the height not to age)-equal to you.

T- How she died?

D- Sir she was going on her way, and then she saw something of white face (may be referred to some 'demon' like thing) and she got scared.

T-*Hoon*... what was it she was scared of?

D- Scared of some demon...

T- Then?

D- Then she went to sudhaan's house, but they were sleeping.

T- Whose house?

D-They live beside each other. Then they took her to hospital in their bus. He hired the bus .But she didn't recover and she died.

T-Ok, who was that , which had white face?

D-Sir he looked like a demon.

T-Really!

D-*Hoon*..when she died we had gone to give milk ,three of us. Pawan, Madan, Madhyaa and me ..four (he corrected himself) .

T-So where will you go now?

D- We will play.

T- Won't you go to the farm?

D- Onnh ..No ,(shaking his head).It is too far sir.[he changed his mind now, earlier he said he will go to farm]

T- How big is this farm ?

D-Sir, from there to here till school (showing by hand to a distant place).Sir, farms are very large in size.

T- Do you have buffalos also?

D-No , sir but they have (referring to another boy, Sandeep who is standing nearby .They have three ,two buffalo and one cow and their cow is expecting also. We had a cow but she died . She also had a calf but she died.

T-Died?

D- *Hoon*... We also had a buffalo, she also died .She stopped giving milk (he used the word *Kood* for stop giving milk but in Hindi it mean jump so again this creates confusion for teacher)

T- From where?

D-She used to that (he answered without understanding and without explaining also).But we had another buffalo and she was very harmless and we used to sit on her back.

T- Really !

D- She used to give one bucket and half bucket of milk (he didn't say 'one and half' but said it in two parts).

T-Oh that much! What you do with that milk?

D- Sir we drink it.

T- But you are very thin.

D-Yes sir.

T- Why?

Sandeep- He doesn't drink much sir.

T- Drink more.

D- Sir I drank full glass one day.

Sandeep- Sir, I drink two –three glass of milk every day.

D-Sir one day I drank four.

(And now both of them were debating on their ability to drink milk!)

This conversation in classroom is interesting in many senses and there can be some parameters for its analyses . One is this conversation is happening between teacher and student and inside the classroom. It is really important thing to notice when a student come to school the first thing s/he faces is the school hierarchy, the system which is maintained by the school to maintain discipline in the school. And the hierarchy is best maintained by teachers by keeping distances to make sure that students should not sit on their heads. This strategy of maintaining distance is conscious effort by always asking students to keep quiet ,not to make any noise .Students are not allowed to think allowed ,which may lead to deeper thinking but it gets crushed in its first stage . Here in this example we can see an effort of loosening that authority to make space for child so that they can share a comfortable rapport and relation which can create ground for further dialogue among them.

This conversation in classroom between teacher(I am the teacher here in this dialogue) and student was a kind of sharing of personal experiences by a student who is interested in sharing about his life outside the school and the continuous enquiry and interest of teacher leads the conversation to an incident where the student told about the girl from his neighborhood who died some time ago .But the reason he knows for death is not clear to him - he just tried to connect two incidents and to narrate a story , an experience. His description of agricultural practices and his involvement with them informed us about the students life , his socio –eco-cultural background. This dialogue helps me to understand about his life his, interest what he likes and dislikes but the important thing is how serious he is about all those things about which he talked whether in discussing about his mukku *jiji* or in his debate about drinking milk. All these description gives me a detailed impression of his world .

Some time I did not understand what Deepak is saying because of non familiarity of the child's dialect and asked him different kind of cross questions to know what is the child was referring to. And in this whole conversation he used words from Bundeli which gave me the chance to continue sharing of his experience. As we believe the absence of student's language makes child silent, I think that is why he is able to converse so long. Use of mother tongue helped student to sustain the dialogue and even helped the other student to join them .This freedom of using his language is something which gives confidence to students. And even teacher's ignorance is accepted very normally and children do not feel pressurized to explain so that teacher can understand.

What are the positive inputs I gave are the chance to share his experience without bothering about his language .and transferring some autonomy and freedom not to answer even some my question and queries ,so that he should not feel pressure to convey the exact point that what I want to know and many times giving him the opportunity to teach me by simply accepting my ignorance of few names and meaning.

But one can ask and people do ask how this talk is useful for classroom or school teaching .Here this question can be answered by what Bruner has suggested as folk pedagogy. It is important factor or issue in folk pedagogy to know what children's minds are like and how to help them to learn. Folk pedagogy suggest to explore what children's mind are like .So introduction of an innovation in teaching will necessarily involve changing the folk pedagogy theory of teacher and pupil as well .Here this conversation more or less does a similar thing by helping teacher to understand student's **mind**.

As we must take it in notice that as Bruner has said “children show strong deposition to culture. They are sensitive to and eager to adopt the folk ways they see around them. They show striking interest in the activity of their parents and peer and with no promoting at all they try to imitate what they observe”. And we can see this case with Deepak who is hardly a seven year old boy telling many things about his life , his surroundings not only what he observe but also how he observes that also .The understanding of children’s behavior can help teacher to prepare right pedagogical device and also aim and objective of learning which can be modified further.

Since teacher’s perception or conception of learner’s mind shapes the instruction s/he will employs. This kind of dialogue equips teacher with the best available theory of child’s mind. Thus this conversation informed the folk pedagogy. Bruner and Howard Garddner suggest that “we must place ourselves inside the heads of our students and try to understand as far as possible the sources and strength of their conception”. Here we can see in this example above how teacher is informed about Deepak’s conception of farming, relationship, demon, death, birth, good, bad etc.

This dialogue helps us to understand and see the limitation of those premised and educational practices which assumed that child is a empty vessel to be filled with knowledge that only adults can provide .To change such mentality or folk pedagogy these sort of dialogue can be of great help .This example shows that child is not ‘tabularasa’ he is learning many thing about the world with his active involvement in society. This dialogue gives ample of evidence to break the notion that child is passive learner waiting to be filled with knowledge. Deepak’s explanation about cropping, sale, purchase, exchange of money etc actually shows what and how much he knows and what help he need.

Here we can see another example of contribution to mental development as Vygotsky said that human activities which he called tools ,work as mean of achieving change and transforming the self and in this activity the use of sign ,which includes spoken language work to fulfill human need and mastery of such sign system that marked individual development .So here this cultural context of the classroom helping the student to master sign , the spoken language as it is postulated that intellectual functioning takes places on the social plane to start with and then proceed to individual level. Here in this example we can see that the how Deepak showing that intellectual growth on personal level and the same time is in the process of learning more with the help of such social interaction with teacher. Here he is learning the skill of communication .

It is very rightly suggested by the Douglas Barnes that, communication system that a teacher sets up in a lesson shapes the role that pupils can play, and goes some distance in determining the kinds of learning that they engage in. So here it is important to see what a teacher has to do in this process of learning regarding their communication and it is very much affected according to the level of understanding of student .These examples of talk give a clue what kind of mantle model this boy has. He is a boy from rural society and can talk about field , animal , demons ,milk ,agricultural practices etc .But often what school offer as reading material to such boys do not have things from his background. And it require extra effort at student front to grasp and comprehend things.

As Barnes talks about understanding which is appropriate for different kind of learning this understanding can develop through talk because the flexibility of speech makes it easy to arrange things what we know in new ways and easy to change them if they seem inadequate. But he also indicates that all kind of talk does not help.

So it is very necessary to think about the objective which we want to achieve through talk. Our school prefers the presentational talk in which learner have to order ideas and present them explicitly but the point is this presentational talk requires certain training, some experience and a certain stage may be where a student is capable of doing that. Here I think necessary to think about the forms of knowledge which Dearden have to suggest .He talks about the central notion of human learning which is ‘experience’ and ‘concept formation’. He mainly

describes concept of three form that is perceptual , practical and theoretical .¹ What child learns from his social milieu with personal concrete experiences perceptual in nature and it is very important to keep it in mind that when a child of this age start coming to school he comes with his perceptual knowledge .When it comes to teaching, schools should adapt its knowledge according to the child and accept his perceptual knowledge in classroom to make thing interesting so that he can trace the root of his school knowledge in his perceptual knowledge in which school often fails. So here again this example makes a case to inform the teacher's conception about child's mind , this talk gives great amount of facilitation to teacher.

Relevance of this form of talk, can be explained in other ways also as Addison Stone calls it the quality of interpersonal relationship in which 'mutual trust' is core element of this relationship .When a student is very new to school this conversation helps both student and teacher to build that mutual trust in each other which will provide the strong base for coming classroom processes. Courtney Cazden highlighted it very correctly "because parents don't have to worry about so much about establishing trust it is inherent in the parent –child relationship but teacher can't assume it. Trusting relationship undoubtedly takes many forms, including the shared enjoyment of humor, depending on both individual and cultural histories and preferences."

There is another important question which is raised by many people , Margret Donaldson also says when children come to school there is wide gap between those are best prepared and those are least prepared for school learning and the question is how to close the gap early ? In this situation it is very helpful for the child if they got the opportunity to interact with teacher at various levels and also for teacher to understand the child's mind.

Here it is relevant to use Paulo Freire's concept of 'narration sickness' . When Freire says teacher –student relationship need a careful analysis inside or outside the school and said that the relationship involves a narrating subject, which is teacher and listening object which is student , but traditionally conversation between them is lacking for any alive and meaningful investigation .They talks about reality as if it were, static, compartmentalized and predictable and discuss things which are completely alien to the existential experience of the students. And this is what leads to narration sickness. Teacher who is not aware of the student's mind are not able to utilize students abilities which can be done through adopting an appropriate pedagogy, which involves selection of content, addressing the pace of learning of child and selection of right scaffolding .But all these things need a better understanding of the child and the teachers often lack that understanding .Most of the time teacher in school don't know much about student except student's name, father name, cast and gender. Teacher often don't know about student as an individual and it happens because they don't interact enough with students.

The narration sickness is also caused by the centralized character of the text book syllabus and curriculum .This centralized character of text book don't allow teacher to think beyond whatever textbook have asked to achieve .This is also very striking thing to note that we study dialogue always in a subject centric framework which is suitable for upper primary classes or for higher classes but there is hardly things available which provides any framework for beginner's talk, how should a teacher address this issue in first and second standard and this is the level where child is learn language primarily .So here it is important to notice and address beginners' talk with a framework .

As in concluding remarks it is said that children who are very new to school and who are not aware about the secondary discourse of the school and articulate themselves mainly through primary discourse need careful handling in terms of using language and sharing experiences. And doing so this informal talk of beginners helps both teacher and student. It helps teacher to improve their folk pedagogy and allows teacher to understand children

¹ Dearden, R.F. (1968), Ch.-6 "learning and experience". The philosophy of primary education..London ,Routledge & Kegan Paul.

mind .As in this case it helps me as a teacher to understand that Deepak as a boy from a rural setting and who spends his time between cattle and farm and have very wide exposure of all these things and I can easily talk about crop patterns to him as issue of sale purchase since he understands these though at primary levels we need some research to find more about it . But certainly this gives me confidence if we need to prepare some material for reading or for testing that can be informed by these interaction. This understanding about student gives a teacher autonomy to create material for student at the local level since it provides student's language and socio -cultural understanding to teacher .For student it is really helpful because this dialogue creates a legitimate space in which a child feels confident about his/her presence , culture, language etc .Absence of sharing often becomes the reason of exclusion for student from classroom. So we should see this dialogue actually as a process of inclusion, the first requirement for learning.

References

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