

Institution: University of Sussex

Unit of Assessment: UoA 25 Education

Title of case study: Transforming policy, teachers' practice and students' learning in reading and higher-cognitive talk

1. Summary of the impact

Research has led to enhanced teacher understanding and practice in developing higher-cognitive thinking, forms of exploratory peer talk and the comprehension of challenging whole texts in their students, leading to new assessment of children in Years 7-9. Additionally, the research has influenced new national training materials on exploratory talk for all secondary-school English teachers, developed students' learning in both talk and reading, and established best practice in English classrooms in these two key areas of literacy, throughout Sussex and beyond.

2. Underpinning research

The research, led by two lecturers from the University of Sussex, directly involved 25 teachers and approximately 1,600 students, through five successive and related projects, conducted from 2004 to 2012. In three of the projects, teachers were partners in design and implementation. This established a research culture in schools and ensured that findings were embedded in practice. The research contributed to teachers researching autonomously in partnered schools across Sussex and beyond. This research was cumulative in its effect, with impact being evidenced from 2008 to the present.

Two projects were conducted by Jo Westbrook [R1, R2]:

- Research in which six English teachers in five schools were interviewed about their knowledge of comprehension, children's literature and classroom practices to encourage independent, wider reading in schools
- A practitioner-inquiry project of six years (2006-12) with three teachers in two schools that developed lower-attaining students' comprehension of long, complex novels by rapid, intense reading of a key novel, parallel reading of related texts and explicit explanations of the comprehension process by teachers.

Key findings:

- Students' independent reading, which underpins successful comprehension, is insufficiently developed by English Departments and schools; [R3, R1]
- Students require access to suitably challenging and engaging *whole* texts and time dedicated to independent reading, during the school day; [R2, R3]
- Higher-order questioning by teachers, encouraging coherent and elaborative inference across the whole text, contributes significantly to students' comprehension. [R3]

Three projects were led by Julia Sutherland [R4, R5]:

- A Teacher Training Agency (TTA)-funded project, introducing guided reading to 13 secondary English classes in as many schools in Sussex (approximately 390 students), involving trainees and mentors;
- A further TTA-funded project, involving six trainee teachers, their classes (180 students) and mentors in five schools to promote students' group talk and higher-order thinking;
- A year-long project in 2007-8 on developing exploratory talk in small groups, particularly in reading texts, with four teachers and 110 students in three schools. Teachers were involved in the research process that included cross-school research, with students exchanging formative peer feedback on videotaped talk.

Key findings:

- The quality of students' collaborative talk and thinking in English can be developed by a

Impact case study (REF3b)

pedagogical model explicitly inducting students into the more formal, extended forms required in school, using ground-rules, teacher/peer modelling, reflection and practice, in safe conditions; [R5, R4]

- Developments in talk were marked for 'low-attaining' students of low socio-economic status, whose cultural model of talk did not match the exploratory forms required; [R5]
- Structured talk, with reflection, had a liberating effect on the majority of students, enabling them to experiment with different identities and ways of talking; [R5, R6]
- Exploratory talk supports the development of reading-comprehension skills. [R5, R4]

In addition to articles in international, peer-reviewed journals, research findings have been disseminated through: chapters in three key text books for English teachers; national conferences on both reading and talk (British Educational Research Association, September, 2013; National Association for the Teaching of English, 2011; British Educational Research Association Language and Literacy SIG, University of Reading, UK, May 2009) local conferences (Guided Reading Conference for the Sussex Consortium of Teacher Education and Research, March, 2004; Teachers as Researchers conference, University of Sussex, June 2012; and Relishing Reading Conference, University of Sussex, November 2012); and through the former Department for Children, Families and Schools 'Teacher Training Research Bank' website (2006-2010).

3. References to the research

- R1** Westbrook, J. (2007) 'Wider reading at Key Stage 3: happy accidents, bootlegging and serial readers'. *Literacy*, 41(3): 147-154.
- R2** Westbrook, J. (2013) 'Reading as a Hermeneutical Endeavour: Whole-Class Approaches to Teaching Narrative with Low-Attaining Adolescent Readers', *Literacy*, 47(1) 42-49.
- R3** Westbrook, J. (2011) 'Access, choice and time: a guide to wider reading in schools 104-116, and Westbrook, J. and Bryan, H. with Hawkins, V., O'Malley, S. and Cooper, K (2010). 'Whatever happened to the Literacy Hour?' 89-103, both chapters in Davison, J., Daly, C. and Moss, J. (eds) *Debates in English Teaching*, London: Routledge.
- R4** Sutherland, J. (2006) 'Promoting group talk and higher-order thinking in pupils by 'coaching' secondary English trainee teachers', *Literacy*, 40, pp. 106-114.
- R5** Sutherland, J. (2013) 'Going 'meta': using a metadiscoursal approach to develop secondary students' dialogic talk in small groups. *Research Papers in Education* DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2013.850528
- R6** Sutherland, J. (2010) 'Speaking and Listening' Westbrook, J. Wider Reading, both chapters in: Clarke, S., Dickinson, P. and Westbrook, J.(eds) *The Complete Guide to Becoming an English Teacher*, London: Sage. 95-106 and 161-173.

Outputs can be supplied by the University on request.

4. Details of the impact

Impact can be measured at a national level, through: changes to national policy on assessment and on professional development; training materials for all English Departments; teacher education, via key textbooks and papers; and on students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Impact on National Policy and Professional Development:

In 2010, a new national assessment framework for talk in English (*Assessing Pupils' Progress*, DCSF, 2010 [C1]) was built on the research undertaken by Sutherland for the previous six years: exploratory peer talk and reflection on talk were established as two of the four assessment focuses to measure progress in talk across Years 7-9. Evidence of direct influence on this major shift in

Impact case study (REF3b)

policy direction can be found in the theoretical rationale for this policy, which first appeared in national training materials for all English Departments and cited Sutherland's second project (DfES, 2007) [C1].

Specific findings used were on the importance of inducting students into exploratory, formal discourses, using ground-rules and metadiscoursal reflection. Such collaborative talk and associated higher-order thinking are important for student cognitive development and academic achievement. The rationale and accompanying training materials on how to develop students' talk were distributed to Heads of English nationally and were used in national training events for the Secondary National Strategy as professional development for both Subject Leaders and teacher-educators in Initial Teacher Education [C2].

Teacher Education:

Chapters by both researchers, drawing on their research on 'Speaking and Listening', 'Wider Reading' and 'The Secondary Literacy Strategy' feature in three textbooks for English teachers (R3, R6 and: Davison, J. and Dowson, J. (Eds) (2009) *Learning To Teach English in the Secondary School*, 3rd Ed, London: Routledge). These books are cited as key textbooks for secondary PGCE/GTP programmes on an Initial Teacher Education (English) site, funded by the TDA [C3]. There is additional evidence in the form of websites and corroboration statements from at least four major ITE Departments nationally (for example, London, Sheffield, Southampton and Reading), that these books are recommended key texts and are having a significant impact on the practice of trainees and experienced teachers of English, including those on Masters programmes, across the country [C4]. Sales of *The Complete Guide to Becoming an English Teacher* are 2,100 copies to date [C5].

Improved practice in schools drives pupil attainment:

Close engagement with six 'flagship' schools has led to specific areas of improved practice [C5]. Westbrook's research collaboration with one local school, with predominantly low socio-economic intakes, triggered their developing the *Drop Everything and Read* project, whereby all students read daily for 15 minutes to develop a culture of independent reading. This has raised pupils' reading attainment and motivation to read at KS3, based on school data, combined with data from the 'Accelerated Reader' computerised reading programme [C5]. The project is perceived by the school to have contributed to a significant increase in their GCSE English results over the last four years: in the last two years, the percentage of students whose reading age was below average decreased from 60 per cent to 50 per cent.

Sutherland's work has led to innovative practice on guided reading and group talk in a range of schools, including Brighton Aldridge Academy, Dorothy Stringer High School and Peacehaven Community School [C5]. A new project at Patcham High School, 'Speak Out!' (2011-14), is directly influenced by Sutherland's work on collaborative talk: 'Speak Out!' develops the oral skills and confidence of the entire school, with a particular focus on preparing students from lower socio-economic groups to progress to successful employment, training or education. 'Speak Out!' is currently working directly with three other schools in areas of socio-economic deprivation in Sussex, to embed their model of how to develop talk and reading, drawn from Westbrook and Sutherland's research, across the four schools, to be extended via these satellites to other school clusters in 2014 [C6].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1** Assessing Pupils' Progress (DCSF, 2010) confirmed as national policy for all KS3 English pupils. The framework for the teaching and assessment of speaking and listening was first articulated with a theoretical rationale in the DfES (2007) *English Subject Leader Development Materials*, London: Department for Education and Skills. Sutherland's work is cited in the latter rationale, which was sent to all English Departments to train teachers in

the new pedagogy.

- C2** Sutherland's research was also promoted on the national DCSF website ('Teacher Training Research Bank') from 2006-2010 to support professional development. Although the National Strategies materials were archived by the current Government in 2010, this assessment framework for KS3 Speaking and Listening is still the only one used in schools: nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101119131802/http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/research/themes/English/improvingthequality – background research
- C3** The following web address corroborates that The National Association for the Teaching of English recommends English teachers and ITE Departments to use Clarke, Dickinson and Westbrook (2010) *The Complete Guide to Becoming an English Teacher*, London: Sage, for the training and development of teachers (containing two chapters based on the two researchers' ten-year research programme in schools):
http://www.ite.org.uk/ite_topics/assessment_for_learning/010.html
http://www.ite.org.uk/index.php/ite_home/readingstorecommend.html
- C4** The following sources include Leaders of ITE provision, able to corroborate, via email communication, the impact that the research-based chapters and whole books written for professional audiences, have had on trainee and experienced English teachers, nationally:
- Senior Lecturer in Education, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge
 - Senior Lecturer in Education, Faculty of Children and Learning, Department of Culture, Communication and Media, Institute of Education
 - Director of Initial Teacher Education, Southampton School of Education, University of Southampton
- 'I use *The Complete Guide to Becoming an English Teacher second edition* – it is a core text – and is compulsory reading for all my English trainees! It really is an excellent resource'. Director of Initial Teacher Education, Southampton School of Education, University of Southampton.
- '*Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School*' is the key text we recommend our [PGCE] group to buy. *Debates in English* is a text we recommend in general.' Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Cambridge.
- C4** Publisher's data available for audit from Commissioning Editor.
- C5** The following sources include teachers and senior managers from Sussex 'flagship' research schools, able to corroborate the continuing impact that the two researchers' research has had on students' learning, teachers' professional development and practice:
- Director of Learning: English, Brighton Aldridge Academy, Brighton and Hove
 - Head Teacher, Peacehaven Community School, East Sussex
 - English Teacher, Portslade Aldridge Academy, East Sussex
- C6** Head Teacher, Patcham High School, Brighton & Hove