

Talk and Explanation

(contributed by Cheryl Mackay)

The hard part of figuring out how to teach is learning when to keep your mouth closed, which is most of the time.

Carl Rogers (1960)

- Possible thinking questions

What are teachers doing when they're not talking?

What are teachers doing when they are talking? What different things do teachers use talk to do?

- This then might lead to a focus on one type of teacher talk: explanation.

Linked to the above, we did a brief 'exploration' of 'explanation' – this took place before students had started their first teaching placement.

Very simply, in groups of 2-3, students were given 15 minutes to consider and complete a grid called 'exploring 'explanation' in the MFL classroom' (see below).

In the feedback, we discussed what they came up with in response to the first question: what do MFL teachers use 'explanation' to do? I was impressed with how many different explanation purposes they came up with – so it was helpful to have an open question for them to explore.

I intend to re-visit 'explanation' in the light of their first teaching placement – focussing on the other two questions.

Teacher Talk: further reading

Wells, G. (2003) *Dialogic inquiry: toward a sociocultural practice and theory of education*. Cambridge: CUP.

I would say this is a book for trainers/educators. It's quite a theoretical read - personally, I've only just dipped into it. The basic idea is that 'talk' is at the heart of learning/education. So if you're interested or like sociocultural theory, Vygotsky's ideas, Halliday's ideas – you'll love this book and I strongly recommend it. (Cheryl Mackay)

Exploring 'explanation' in the Modern Foreign Language classroom

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What do MFL teachers use 'explanation' to do?	Do teachers always have to do the explaining?	Is 'explanation' always necessary? What alternatives might there be?