Dialogue Between Teacher and Learners in English Class: The Case of Adult Learning Activities

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Abstrak: Pengajaran bahasa Inggris untuk orang dewasa memerlukan pendekatan khusus karena kondisi orang dewasa yang unik dengan berbagai persoalan baik psikologis maupun daya tangkapnya. Di samping itu, kemampuan pembelajaran mandiri juga mungkin dikembangkan sebagai alternatif untuk mencapai hasil pembelajaran yang maksimal. Untuk itu dibutuhkan suatu jembatan pemahaman, atau dialog antara pengajar dengan pembelajar. Dengan demikian, dialog sebenarnya bukan sekedar proses yang terjadi secara natural dalam proses pembelajaran tetapi merupakan aspek kegiaatan yang harus didesain sebagai bagian integral dari strategi pembelajaran bahasa bagi orang dewasa.

Kata kunci: *Dialogue, adult learners, Management of interraction, Joint process.*

Introduction

Teaching language can work well if there is sufficient knowledge of the properties and behavior of learners. Successful or unsuccessful learners, caused by various factors; one of them is the quality of relationships between people who learn with teachers or lecturers. As quoted by Sugeng, et al., stated, "All forms of language teaching can be developed properly if we have enough knowledge about learners and about learning and teaching process itself."[1] Thus, knowledge about the learning process will assist in facilitating the learning and teaching so that learners can achieve maximum results.

This paper is one attempt to find the necessary activities in the learning process in a class of adults who learn the language. By specializing on the adult learner, this paper is intended to identify things that are needed by teachers or lecturers and adult learners in the learning process of English as a foreign language. This paper is expected, among others, could contribute to growth and development of theories about the activities in the classroom in teaching English as a foreign language to adult learners.

Discussions of teaching, learning, and assessment in the context of Indonesia at the present time have to recognize that these are controversial and contested topics. Within the broad context of education as a whole, the increasing political attention paid to what teachers actually do in classrooms, as well as the charged debates about the increasingly selective processes by which learners in schools transfer between primary and secondary schooling, secondary and tertiary phases, and between tertiary and university or the world of work, have brought ideas about assessment onto the centre stage of political and media discussion. For adult learners, these conditions are in some ways even more pointed because the system is still dominated by and organized around the idea of education as something mainly for children and young people, undertaken full-time, and leading in an uncomplicated way to national qualifications. The range of purposes for learning and the meanings of success and achievement in learning are more complex and diverse in relation to adult learners. Rather, adult learners have to fit into a system ever more narrowly-focused on the goal of improving industrial and business productivity, and which utilizes indicators of achievement, success and quality designed for that purpose alone.

It is quite important of ensuring that there is an appropriate "atmosphere" in the class for effective learning. The atmosphere must meet the need to enable adult learners, particularly those new to formal learning, or who have had negative previous experiences of education, to be relaxed and comfortable, so that they are ready for effective learning, and to face any challenges involved.

For adult educators, this has always been one of the first rules for teachers, based on the assumption that for many adults, formal learning may be an unfamiliar and potentially threatening experience. The elements that contribute to the "atmosphere" of the class include the physical environment, the layout of the room, the behavior of other students, and, most importantly, the behavior of the teacher. Teachers are encouraged to work on generating friendly relations, goodwill and trust between all the members of the group, so that individual students are more willing to take risks, to expose themselves, as part of the sometimes difficult process of learning.

Learning through dialogue is a major theme in the literature on adult learning, though it appears with a wide variety of nuances and emphases. For Knowles

[1985], dialogue is both practical and political. *Firstly*, it recognizes the centrality of the status of the learners as adults and enables the exposition and utilization of their accumulated experience and knowledge for the benefit of everyone in the group. *Secondly*, it is through dialogue with the learners themselves that the teacher can best discover how to differentiate (or perhaps "personalize") the learning program so that the diversity of needs and purposes among any group of learners can be addressed. *Thirdly*, dialogue enables teachers to orient the learning program towards those particular tasks.[2]

Politically, Hostler (1986) agrees that if we see adults as autonomous and self-directing, they have a right to participate in decisions that affect them[3]. In relation to learning, participation cannot be achieved without discussion and dialogue between all the members of the group. A vision of groups as models for democratic practice through discussion and debate is one of the longest-established elements of a major, influential tradition in British adult education, originating in the corresponding societies and 19th century socialist movements.[4]

Yet, a utilitarian shift is evident in recent writing, where similar modes and espoused values of learning and participation are recommended for effectiveness rather than democratic propriety.[5] The earlier focus on democratic discussion and debate was content-focused, aiming to share experiences and accumulated knowledge of the topic in hand. In contrast, a recent focus is on discussion of learning itself, and of the ways in which it can be evaluated and developed. This emphasis is seen not just as a means of improving attainment but, variously, as capacity-building for the future[6], as a means of addressing anxiety or lack of motivation about learning[7], and/or as a way of building autonomy.[8]

In other words the earlier focus of this tradition was concerned with a democratic process of deciding the 'what' of a particular course of adult learning and maximizing the resources of knowledge and experience available to the group: more recent studies are more concerned with promoting learner participation in order to make any learning process more effective, in terms both of accountability to taxpayers and to individual learners themselves. This practical perspective is supported also by Tusting and Barton (2003), whose survey of models and theories of adult learning concludes with seven key ideas

about how adults learn: that adults have their own motivations for learning, based on their existing knowledge and experience, that adults have a drive towards self-direction and autonomy, that adults can learn about their own learning processes, that all real life activities contribute to adult learning, that adults reflect and build on their experience, that reflective learning is unique to each person and often incidental and idiomatic, and finally that learning can be transformative, enabling people to reorganize their experience and see situations in new ways.[9]

The writers reviewed in this section fall into two categories: those who treat dialogue as central to all teaching and learning, and those who write about particular pedagogical objectives that can be achieved through using dialogue. The first group treats dialogue between learners as well as between learners and teachers, as of central importance; the second group focus more on the role of dialogue between teacher and learner. We discuss each group in turn in the following subsections.

Dialogue as the Central of Teaching and Learning Process

Vygotsky, as quoted by Alexander, claims that learning is a social process where the true direction of learning is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual.[10] For him, teachers are not merely facilitators, secondary to the process as theories of andragogy would have it, nor mere transmitters of learning. Instead, learning is a process with teachers and learners as interactive participants: both learner engagement and teacher interventions are essential. Nevertheless, Alexander believes that what learners say is more important than what teacher say, implying that dialogue enables teachers to facilitate future planning of the learning process on the basis of their inter-pretation of what learners say. As Alexander's focus is primarily on the education of children, this is an argument for dialogue based on its efficacy for school learning rather than its political desirability; however, he also points out that if it is effective for children's learning, then it will also be for adult education, including the education of teachers. Alexander characterizes dialogic teaching as collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful, viewing know-ledge as problematic and open rather than given and closed.[11] In a similar vein,

Marr argues that: "*A socio-cultural educational perspective sees learning as induction into 'discourses' or 'communities of practice' through interaction with more expert others. At the heart of any discourse is the language and symbols that carry its special meanings. To become a member of the discourse one must begin to learn its language.*"[12]

In relation to numeracy teaching, Marr argues that students need opportunities to learn the language of mathematics through talking and dialogue in order to support subject learning, as well as to improve their capacity for learning, autonomy or motivation. She argues that learning activities that provide access to and practice in subject discourse are more pressing in mathematics than other subjects, because of the relative absence of explanatory written texts available to students.

> Whereas most other subject areas rely on an extensive canon of write prose (to be found in textbooks, encyclopedias and school libraries) to provide the impression of stability and permanence to knowledge, this is noticeably absent in mathematics. Textbooks tend to be pastiches of repetitive activities and fragments of knowledge.[13]

This produces a heavy reliance on the teacher's verbal explanations to carry the knowledge and understanding of the subject. Reliance on the spoken mode begins to explain the "catechistic" type of interaction so prevalent in mathematics classrooms.[14] If transmission dominates mathematics in order to define and control the curriculum, it is not surprising that interactive, open-ended and investigative dialogic activities are relatively uncommon.

Very similar perspectives are taken by Swan introducing a collection of resources aiming to support teachers of mathematics in post-16 education to develop their practice. Swan also sees the main task as to move from 'transmission' to 'connective and challenging' modes of teaching, and from 'passive' to 'active' modes of learning. He doesn't see dialogue as a simple two-way process between equals: for him the teacher has a critical pro-active and leadership role, demanding complex and high level skills. If the dialogue is to be purposeful, the teacher needs to make its purpose clear, encourage an exploratory and reflective mode of discussion, encourage 'discussion of alternative methods and understandings', welcome mistakes and misconceptions as opportunities for learning, ask probing, challenging questions of learners, and finally, to draw out the important ideas arising from each session.[15]

Absolum's work is based on long-term development work in 10 New Zealand schools. It is included in this review because his is a fully worked-out guide to the use of formative assessment approaches in teaching and learning that appears to be applicable to any sector.[16] While he doesn't refer explicitly to lifelong learning, he bases his work on learning theorists such as Argyris and Schon (1974) and Sadler (1989), whose theories focus on learning in general, rather than in any specific context or phase of life.[17]

That his book is relevant to a consideration of adult learning is also suggested by the fact that his discussion is explicitly applied to the teaching and learning of all age groups within schools, more or less without distinction. He argues that to be effective, learning must enable the learner to own the learning process, and to be significant, it must result in the learner owning what is learnt. His ideas link the work of Black and Wiliam with the work of Argyris and Schön (1974) on organizational learning. At the centre of what he sees as an 'archway of teaching and learning capabilities' he puts the development of 'learning-focused relationships' between teacher and learners, and between learners themselves: the key mechanism for this is continuous, interactive dialogue.[18]

Many other reports also highlight the significance of learners' feelings about learning, and of the relationships between teachers, learners, and others: 'relationships matter in learning, including teacher-student and student-student relationships, also networks of support learners are part of it'.[19] 'Feelings and emotions shaped people's experiences of learning. For some this made engagement, particularly in more formal, structured learning very difficult while other people talked about formal learning provision as a safe haven from other overwhelming issues in their lives'.[20] Teachers must be able and willing to engage with the complexity of learners' different and developing states of mind and feeling about learning, because 'there is a complex relationship between teaching and learning: learners don't learn what teachers teach'.[21]

This point is made in different ways by a number of commentators. Barton and Papen[22] argue that for effective learning to take place, teachers must be willing to engage with wider aspects of people's lives. Nonesuch[23] points out that whether you are a therapist or not, the emotions in your math class are not going away. She sees this issue as a key part of pedagogy. For her, students'

feelings about learning must be made explicit if they are not potentially to be a barrier, and this is another way in which the teacher needs communicative skills of the highest order. Her work draws strongly on that of Ginsburg and Gal[24], who propose 13 principles for effective adult numeracy teaching, many of which depend on the facilitation of dialogue in the classroom, including the need to address students' attitudes and beliefs regarding learning and mathematics, to determine what students already know, to encourage the practice of estimating skills, and group activities such as searching for multiple solutions to the same problems, etc. Most of these strategies are also evaluated and explored in great detail by Swan.[25]

Ivanic and Tseng (2005) also take a radical view of the importance of dialogue in adult learning: 'Learning is not predictable as a product of input, but created through constant negotiations between individuals, social environments and broader social influences'. They suggest that teachers need to pay attention to the beliefs about learning, teaching, language literacy and numeracy that learners and teachers bring with them to the learning-teaching encounter, and that teachers should identify learners' intentions as a key factor in learning events. 'Social interaction is the key mechanism through which learning takes place. Teaching is best characterized as the creation of 'learning opportunities' through the management of interaction'[26] Belzer suggests that adult literacy learners' constructions of previous learning contexts can function as 'screens' between the learner and effective learning. Contextual features of current learning contexts may pass easily through a learner's screen, may be a misfit creating ambivalence and tension, or may exceed the boundary of the screen's frame. This perspective, like the ones referred to above, proves problematic to the notion of the simple transmission of learning in these contexts, and can only be addressed by rich communicative interaction between learners and teachers.[27] Baxter, et al., record students discussing the greater confidence they felt as a result of being known individually by the teacher, in sharp contrast to school and some previous adult experiences. They valued both individual relationships with their teachers and also group working, which allowed for supportive relationships to develop between the students themselves.[28]

An influential figure is Freire (1972), who criticizes what he calls the 'banking system' of education in which teachers deposit knowledge into passive learners, based on a static, positivist view of objective knowledge and power relations. For him, liberating education comprises shared acts of cognition, problem posing and dialogue through which unequal power relations challenged and overcome. Dialogue portrays reality as a process of transformation, not a static entity.[29]

From this perspective, teaching based on dialogue is ongoing formative assessment, where reflection and negotiation between all participants focused on what is learned and how successful the process is. The program content is neither a gift nor an imposition of bits of information deposited in the students, but rather an organized, systematized and developed representation of things that people want to know more about.

Teachers engage in dialogue in order to understand learners 'objective situation and to develop learners' awareness of that situation. Teachers must develop materials and activities that enable learners to pose problems, to facilitate dialogue aimed at understanding the problems and moving towards solutions. Teachers therefore need to establish a learning context in which their authority is not oppressive, so that learning takes place on the learner' own territory, using dialogue and content led by them.

A Freirean perspective on teaching mathematics is provided by Benn, who argues that dialogue in math teaching with adults is essential to overcome dependency and isolation, and that this can take the form of talking, reading, or writing. This suggests, implicitly, that teaching through dialogue is indistinguishable from continuous formative assessment.[30]

For her, traditional mathematics teaching epitomizes Freire's concept of "banking education", in which teaching consists of telling the learners about knowledge taken as given and fixed. Instead, she argues that mathematics needs to acknowledge the social values it embodies, that learners should be empowered to create their own knowledge and that the mathematics curriculum should be concerned with the generation and solution of real-life mathematical problems and questions by learners. Teachers must "walk the fine line of managing learning experiences in order to meet learners' expectations

sensitively offering challenges to develop a deeper conceptualization of mathematics".

Finally, in the first group, we find an argument that sees the dialogue at the heart of democratic adult learning processes as a vital element of living in risk society. Jansen and Van der Veen (1996) present a critique of post-modern theory, arguing that under conditions of modernity people are freed from traditional social and ideological bonds but subjected to the anonymous standardizing rationalities of the state and the market.[31]

Individuals are expected to take responsibility for their own lives, making their own decisions, in contexts in which all sources of information are potentially unreliable. The paper sees adult education as having a valuable potential function as a broker in problem-solving networks, raising issues of values, contracts between educators and learners, and new approaches to professionalism demonstrating both distance and involvement. It calls for reframing experiential learning, in which expert knowledge and learners' experiences are subjected to critical and constructive group examination, through dialogue in which both have equal status.

Adult education in this light will stick closer to the daily hopes and worries of learners, and be more prepared to further dialogue between conflicting experiences, interests and ideological images. Teachers' roles will be to stimulate reflection in a Socratic way, by raising awareness of the crucial questions to ask instead of pretending to know the answers. This echo of Benn's view of the equivocal certainty of traditional mathematics education demonstrates the similarity of this view with Freire's perspective; in both cases the very broad view taken of adult education within societies undergoing radical change offers relatively undefined guidance about the specific role of the teacher in this situation.

Dialogue as A Useful Way for Specific Teaching and Learning Objectives

This indistinct picture is perhaps clarified by the views of commentators on dialogue in the second group, who focus on three specific functions for the dialogic approach to teaching and learning. These in turn see dialogue as the

means for teachers and learners jointly to research problems of understanding and to develop new knowledge and critiques of existing knowledge; as the joint evaluation of performance; and as the means by which teachers can gain understanding of learners' previous experience, so as to use this understanding for planning and differentiation. Seeing teaching and learning processes as research is perhaps a familiar idea in the context of higher education, though apparently 'a relatively low proportion of academics read the research journals on teaching their subject'.[32]

For example, Ivanic suggests that the teachers' quest to find out the nature of a problem in understanding either literary conventions or the rules of conventional punctuation should be seen as a research project. This cannot be undertaken without the full participation of the learner, not just as research subject, but as researcher too, through dialogue.[33]

In the context of teaching writing, Ivanic argues that teachers should treat learner-writers as authorities, and that helping learners write what they mean necessitates talking, as a way of "researching" the content and literary conventions the learner wants to use. Dialogue therefore facilitates cooperative formative and diagnostic assessment of strengths, weaknesses, and barriers to learning and this is integral to teaching and learning. Most student and tutor pairs or groups talk a lot about the feelings and difficulties involved in writing. This sort of language awareness is being more and more widely recognized as an essential component of learning. What is different… is to recognize these insights as 'research findings' as 'knowledge'.[34]

Ivanic's later publication (1996) argues that non-standard punctuation is often based on perfectly logical thinking, and that standard punctuation is not in itself inherently logical. It is therefore crucial for teaches to discuss the thinking behind their mistakes with learners in order to help them understand standard punctuation.[35] An instructive example of dialogue as formative assessment suggests that 'Introspection about strategies (for achieving the correct use of punctuation) is a useful teaching method in itself. Learners are thinking about meaning – they are logical even if they are mistaken.'

A similar view is proposed by Fowler and Mace (2005), who promote the idea of teaching and learning as research through joint mutual investigation

learners and teacher. They argue for the particular relevance of this approach for adult literacy, and their view supports not only Freire's account of learning, where the content of learning is being constructed, but also more "autonomous", cognitive models of learning, in which the content is given but the learner's orientation to it is being investigated for learning purposes (*i.e.*, a model of formative assessment).[36]

The research model promoted is ethnographic, requiring a range of data from different sources and of different types, and a "grounded" research methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in which findings 'emerge' gradually from the data. It argues that this type research can deliver 'empowerment' to learners, as well as being a framework for improving literacy skills.[37]

Three papers focusing on the teaching and learning of writing argue with different emphases for the importance of talking as part of the learning process. Kelly *et al.*'s (2004) review of research and practice finds that talking about writing supports effective learning, and for the importance of learners expanding their understanding of process aspects of writing, such as planning and revision, and in which they can re-examine assumptions they might hold which may block learning, such as the idea that writing is either right or wrong.[38] Similarly, two American commentators argue that in the context of the learning of writing, it is essential to enable learners to make explicit unarticulated ideas and concepts about how people write,[39] and to be involved in a process of 'co-constructing representations of their assumptions about the writing process'.[40] Russell found that many students didn't understand that reading had any connection with writing, and observed that while many teachers of writing for adult literacy learners encourage their students to focus on content rather than form, most students want above all to avoid making 'mistakes', and that it is very hard to convince students that mistakes do not matter as part of learning. 'Teachers and learners appear to be speaking two different languages, perhaps different dialects of the language of writing instruction'.[41]

Dialogue is also a medium for collective assessment of a performance. Moss (1995) provides a *detailed exploration of the role of the learner as writer* using the teacher as editor, in language experience learning situations.[42] The paper shows how feedback that edits individual students' own words is

problematic both for creative writing and the pursuit of the 'correct' use of English. However, the process of negotiation between a teacher and learner which aims to facilitate the production of a finished and 'correct' but also authentic piece of work (central to formative assessment, and similar to the process of assessing a dramatic or musical performance), can be a powerful means of supporting future learning, confidence, and motivation. Condelli[43] and Roberts et al.[44] make similar points in relation to ESOL learners. They point out that the most significant mode of learning for ESOL learners is through group interaction.

In adult literacy education, Mace argues that dialogue between teacher and learner enables the teacher to understand as fully as possible the nature of the learner's previous experience of schooling and assessment. She uses extended quotations from adult literacy students to show the importance of schooling for their levels of motivation for engagement in formal learning, and in forming their attitudes and ideas about assessment, and their perceptions of success. She implicitly recognizes the notion of 'assessment careers' proposed by Ecclestone and Pryor. She argues that teachers have to understand the particular ways this experience impacts on learning as adults in order to find effective strategies for individuals and the group. Again, this view of dialogue corresponds closely with ideas about diagnostic assessment of a very broad range of needs, experiences and starting points.[45]

For Reder, it is absolutely essential that teachers and programs of learning engage with learners' culture and backgrounds. He cites educational and anthropological research which contradicts theories of learning suggesting that learners simply lack skills which they need to acquire: rather, whatever their age, experiences and cultural background, learners arrive already familiar with a range of literacy practices associated with their particular family and social environment, practices that Reder describes as 'context-specific'. Failure to recognize this has led programs to make erroneous assumptions about the home lives of students from poor, minority or immigrant families as being 'deficient' environments for supporting literacy development, resulting in a mismatch between what learners are familiar with in relation to literacy practices, and what the program teaches.[46]

On the basis of this wide-ranging survey of research, Reder argues for the importance of what he calls 'practice-engagement theory', which proposes that teachers and programs must understand how literacy practices develop through collaborative activity, that 'participation structures' are contexts for literacy development, that social meanings shape literacy development, and that literacy develops primarily through becoming conscious of and extending existing practices, rather than through the learning of 'new' ones. In particular, practice engagement theory provides accounts for how fluency in literacy practices can be developed without formal instruction. It follows from this that formal instruction needs firstly to be aligned as far as possible to the specific literacy practices that individual learners' are familiar with already, and secondly, to try to build learning on these practice-specific contexts rather than separately from them. Each of these requires teachers to investigate the specific practices and contexts that their learners are already familiar with, the profile of which may be quite different in each case.[47]

One group of commentators, supporting the importance of dialogue in teaching and learning, point out that if a teacher is to initiate, support and learn from dialogue with learners, they will need complex communication skills. These papers consider in more detail what these skills are, and how teachers might be supported and trained to develop and maintain them.

Alexander, for example, argues that teacher training should be essentially dialogic in form, so as to exemplify and at the same time develop the necessary skills and dispositions.[48] Beder reports that how teachers interact with adult basic education learners is an important factor in engagement, which is defined in his study as 'trying hard to learn'. His report says less about the nature of these interactions than about the difference made by their frequency, with implications for teachers with larger groups.[49]

Belfiore and Folinsbee, in an ethnographic study of adult learners in the workplace, show how a manager delivering formal training on new quality control systems needs to allow employees to voice criticisms of the present quality regime in practice, in order to gain credibility and engage the employees in the formal aspects of the course. Teachers and trainers in the workplace, whether professionals delivering formal programs or peers supporting learning

on the job, need to exemplify effective communicative practices themselves. The paper thus argues for the integration of training with work practice, and demonstrates the strong link between the organizational style and culture of the workplace, and effective learning at work. [50]

Merton reports on a study of basic skills provision among young adults that teachers' language should be 'easy to understand and avoid long words'. Choice of words and tone of voice seemed to influence how the young people performed under pressure, and their motivation to continue their learning. [51] Ward and Edwards report that adult literacy and numeracy learners' prefer teachers who 'listen' [52], Gardener also highlights the importance of listening to learners in the context of teaching writing, in order to ensure that judgments of value and of appropriateness (of tone, or of grammar) are arrived at mutually rather than imposed. [53]

This issue is at the heart of the discussion by Zuss, who, from a Freirean perspective:

> 'The privileging of certain modes of discourse and organization of knowledge involves institutionalized norms of rationality, meaning making, and literate interaction – modes that, unevenly at best, include as well as exclude salient varieties of cultural expression….these values are inculcated, however implicitly and indirectly, by well-intentioned teachers and administrators, through privileged forms of language and linguistic interaction". [54]

In addressing this problem, teaching and learning needs to be seen from a social constructivist perspective, in order to avoid psychological or social reductionism:

> "It is vital to examine the experiential and cognitive resources individuals from diverse ethnic and sub cultural origins bring to the cross-cultural classroom. Ethnographic description of classrooms alone, however, while essential, is not always sufficient to explain the uneven levels of literacy, or cultural capital within and between first and second languages and their complex interplay within matrices of power, culture, and value". [55]

From this perspective and in discussing the education of second language students, Zuss develops a critique of 'process approaches' to the teaching and learning of language and literacy, which he argues:

> "emphasize 'free writing', non-directive teaching, and the use of journals for personal writing experience (and) are intended to permit self-expression and the

generation of student-centered texts in non-authoritarian contexts. In actual classroom practice, however, the process approach can serve to suppress the development of voice. Particularly in cross-cultural settings, emphasis on process over product, or 'organism' over mechanism, while generative of writing, can disregard the salient cultural choices members of discourse communities are likely to use in self-representation and expression".[35]

'Talk is work in the language classroom', as one group of commentators has said.[37] Zuss's analysis serves as a reminder of how difficult this work can be: the emphasis on dialogue in teaching and learning has highly complex and demanding implications for both teachers and students in terms of addressing issues of discourse, power, identity, and agency, as well as learning, both in the classroom setting and in the wider world.

Finally in this section, it is important to highlight the position of commentators who argue that one of the pedagogical advantages of a dialogic approach is the expression, clarification and exploration of conflicting beliefs or viewpoints. Nonesuch quotes a small scale research study suggesting that the externalization and expression of resistance to aspects of the learning situation can be a critical stage in negotiating a developmental process with the learner resulting in more commitment to learning rather than less.[38] Swan, in a comparative study of different pedagogical approaches in mathematics, argues that it is often through the provocation of 'cognitive conflicts' that the most effective learning takes place. He reports on three experiments in which 'expository teaching' approaches were compared with 'conflict and discussion'. He finds that when learners' existing conceptual approaches were identified and subjected to conflict comparison, markedly better scores for attainment and understanding were achieved, than with more traditional modes of expository teaching. He suggests that this greater effectiveness is due to 'the identification of and focus on specific conceptual obstacles, the emphasis on oral rather than textual explanation, the increased level of challenge offered, the intensity of discussion and involvement generated, and the valuing of intuitive methods and explicit recognition of conceptual obstacles', each of which imply the centrality of dialogue in the process of learning.[39]

Closing

Dialogue between teachers and learners is seen by different commentators either as a central element of all teaching and learning, or alternatively as important in achieving a range of specific pedagogical objectives. For the first group, social interaction is the key mechanism through which learning takes place, and teaching is the creation of opportunities for learning through the management of interaction. It enables learners to practice and acquire the languages of different communities of practice, to 'own' the learning process and what is learnt. Through it teachers can engage with learners' previous experiences, and thus their beliefs and feelings about learning. For the second group, dialogue is the means by which teachers get information to support planning and differentiation, through which learning can be a joint process of research between teacher and learner, through which teachers can find out about learners' misapprehensions and misconceptions, and through which teachers can understand the knowledge, skills and practices that learners already have. Both perspectives put a premium on the need for teachers to be able to use the highest and broadest levels of communicative skills.

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