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Fisher, Robert (2009). *Creative Dialogue: Talk for Thinking in the Classroom*. London: Routledge

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In this challenging and thought provoking text, Robert Fisher raises serious questions about questioning and talk in the classroom. *Creative Dialogue* is well documented with informative headings and is infused with demonstrative stories from the traditional tales featuring wise man and trickster, Nasruddin. These stories not only illustrate the meaning of each chapter but are guaranteed to capture the imagination of the reader.

Each chapter introduces and discusses in depth an aspect of the use of talk for encouraging thinking in the classroom at any level. The concept of talk and discussion is introduced initially to demonstrate the extensive research support for this aspect of classroom teaching and learning which has been sadly de-emphasized with the forceful and damaging focus on testing and curricular design which harms children in the name of testing and school and district accountability. *Creative Dialogue*

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demonstrates the value and benefit for children's learning that a return to a focus on children will bring: a focus on children learning, a focus on children thinking, and a focus on children asking questions.

After beginning with listening and questioning, the author goes on to critical talk and the development of verbal reasoning. Talking and thinking across the curriculum is followed by talking in groups, extending talk for thinking and dialogic assessment. The author concludes with the future of dialogue in the classroom. In each case, the chapter builds on the one before and develops the ongoing theme of thinking and learning in a vibrant and active and child-centered classroom. All of the learning discussed and encouraged is powerful and important for individual children of all ages, but is also learning that supports and develops children's ability and expertise in successful completion of those dreaded tests with an eye to demonstrating that the best test preparation is not the mindless test prep you see now in so many classrooms for so many hours of each day, but rather the thoughtful and powerful learning that authentic and serious dialogue brings to the classroom. This learning brings the creative and powerful engagement of children's minds to their own learning and is the best approach to their personal development as well as preparation for the most successful test performance.

The first chapter on listening highlights the most important skill for learning in useful and powerful ways. Questioning is covered in the second chapter through stories that portray examples from Nasruddin. Nasruddin's questions add humor and depth and are excellent examples of questioning for learning and critical thinking that contrast with the wasted time of narrow minded questions which are factual and literal and locked in "prove to the teacher" modes that poison classrooms today.

In chapter three, Fisher discusses creative talk for thinking including such topics as questioning and challenging, making connections and seeing relationships, imagining what might be, exploring and extending ideas, reflecting critically, and creative talk in practice. Each topic is described in depth with examples and demonstrations, including sometimes a humorous illustrative story from Nasruddin. The final section, Creative Talk in Practice,"

is a description of many different activities that can be used in classrooms to stimulate and encourage the various forms of creative talk discussed throughout the chapter.

Each of the remaining chapters in this excellent book are portrayed in an identical manner. “Critical Talk” shows how talk can be used to develop children’s skills in the important areas of verbal reasoning, presenting arguments, distinguishing fact from opinion and using critical talk in practice. Again stories from Nasruddin guide everyday examples and clear demonstrations all serve to direct the reader in his or her learning. Examples demonstrate elements of reasoning discussed and exercises provide opportunities for students to try out their own reasoning skills and have discussions with each other about the results.

“Talking to Learn” demonstrates how powerful talk can be for children learning across disciplines. Sections include concepts and understanding, dialogic models, using technology, research, objectives, goals, and learning strategies. Fisher discusses using mapping, memory strategies and summarization in developing thinking skills. The chapter ends with various activities for student practice and reflection.

“Talking Together” outlines various possibilities including pairs, small groups, and other combinations for purposes of asking and investigating questions and issues, finding solutions, and practicing dialogic skills. Identifying questions and solutions is key to critical talk and thinking. Many examples and activities end the chapter and provide reader-students many opportunities for important learning.

“Extending Talk” leads students to explore deeper thinking, philosophical questions, and various opportunities for shared thinking and talking, ending again with activities for practice and learning. “Dialogic Assessment” reflects back on the uses of talk in thinking and provides guidance for assessment. The dialogic future leads to other opportunities for talking, thinking and learning and includes practical activities to guide the reader/student.

This book is a powerful tool for learning and teaching. It might be used as a resource text for any course in

education where students must learn to think and reflect and respond to issues through talking and writing. It would especially supplement any education course in literacy learning or philosophy as these often do not include serious and reflective talk in the course of learning. I am impressed with this book and look forward to using it myself in the courses I teach.

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