Better than “Best Practice”: Confronting – and Learning from – Problems of Practice  
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**Episode transcript**

Prior to the lesson in which this particular sequence was recorded, the pupils wrote stories (under conditions of limited time to simulate the national tests) and then received feedback from their teacher, including targets for revising their stories. Immediately before this lesson they rewrote part of their stories. In this lesson they share their different targets, and then discuss one pupil’s attempts to improve his story. The beginning of this latter discussion is captured below. The pupil, Harry, has read his first story out loud. The teacher, Ms. Leigh, then says, “We’re going to be your judges now. So we’re going to have X-factor. We’re going to decide marks out of ten for how much Harry has improved in the second version of his story.” This is the point at which the transcript begins.

**Lesson Transcript**:  

1 Ms Leigh: OK so (.)
2 pupils: ye:ah
3 Ms Leigh: we’re going to have X-Factor
4 pupils: ye:ah
5 Ms Leigh: we’re going to decide marks out of ten for how much (.)
6 William: ((hums X-Factor theme and gestures))
7 Ms Leigh: in the second version of his story
8 Harry: ((begins to take off his jumper))
9 Ms Leigh: so he had to make sure
10 Karen and Olivia ((begins listing on fingers))
11 that he wasn’t missing out any words (.)
12 and he had to make sure as well
13 that he was adding enough detailed description
14 to give us some idea (.)
15 about what was going on (.)
16 OK let’s see
17 marks out of ten
18 and a reason for why please
19 . ((3 minutes later – Harry has read out the second

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1 **Key transcription conventions:**

- (text ) - Transcription uncertainty
- (xxxxxxxx) - Indistinguishable speech
- (. ) - Brief pause (under one second)
- (1) - Longer pause (number indicates length to nearest whole second)
- ({ }) - Description of prosody or non-verbal activity
- [ ] - Overlapping talk or action
- [text] - Emphasised relative to surrounding talk (underlined words)
- te:xt - Stretched sounds
- sh- - Word cut off
- >text< - Speech delivered more rapidly than surrounding speech.
- TEXT - Shouting
- (.hhh) - Audible inhalation
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. version of his story and the pupils have discussed it
. in pairs))

101 Ms Leigh: fingers up
102 i::n
103 five seconds
104 to show me how many marks out of ten
105 you think this one is worth
106 so in five seconds you’re going to hold up
107 ((holds up one finger))
108 one finger if you think it’s only one out of ten
109 ((holds up ten fingers)) ten out of ten
110 ((holds up seven fingers)) seven out of ten
111 >ready five four<
112 everyone should have their fingers up with a decision
113 three (2)
114 two one zero
115 ((Pupils raise hands to illustrate score))

116 Harry: ten
117 oh my
118 Ms Leigh oo okay
119 Harry: I have a nine over there
120 that’s good
121 [I have a nine
122 William: [and you’ve got a nine next to you [(xxxxxx) ((pointing))
123 Harry: [er I have a nine
124 I have a nine
125 Pupil: dude you have a ten
126 Harry: a ten where
127 we have a ten
128 Ms Leigh: okay Harry
129 I want you to pick three separate numbers
130 and ask them to explain why
131 ((Harry stands up out of his seat))
132 Harry: excuse me
133 explain why you’ve only give me a five
134 William: because
135 Pupils: ((laughter))
136 ((most pupils put down their hands))
137 William: because in the first story y-
138 you had more descriptive (. ) words
139 and you didn’t ex-
140 in the second story you didn’t [explai:n the:
141 Julie: ((to neighbouring pupil) [(xxxxxxxxxxxx)
142 William: man who was changing the weather
143 and
144 the characters (. )
145 a:nd
146 in the other one-
147 because in the first one you had (.)
148 better descriptive words
149 in that one you had more
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Harry: ((leaning forward)) d-
Ms Leigh: Julie what were you going to say because you-
I could see you ((makes whispering noise))
on the back there
Julie: yeah like because h-the better-
the first one was better because he had like
more descriptive words
but in that one he didn’t like
describe the:
person who was changing the weather much
Harry: because I didn’t get that far though
I didn’t get that far
[(so it’s like-)
Ms Leigh: [Tamara
what did you think about
the quality of the words that he used
Tamara: they were quite good
but (2)
he could’ve used like more descriptive words
Ms Leigh: give me an example
Tamara: li::ke (2)
(some xxxxxx)
Ms Leigh: (come on) William you’ve spoken now
so for example
my personal choice
I really liked er:
scalding ((pointing out words on the whiteboard))
er blazed
peaceful
placid
and there’s another one
[obscuring
Pupil: [what does placid mean
Ms Leigh: calm
radiance
I thought actually the word choices were very advanced
what would you have preferred to have seen
Pupil: obscuring
Tamara: erm more like (.)
I don’t know really
it’s just hard to explain
Ms Leigh: okay
Harry: you can say it’s rubbish
I don’t mind
Ms Leigh: would you say that
Tamara: no
Ms Leigh: why not
Tamara: because he’s still got loads of really good words a:nd
(1)
(no xxxxxxx)
Ms Leigh: sorry could you speak up
no:
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202 Tamara: (erm)
203 (2)
204 Ms Leigh: the reason that I’m asking you is because
205 I know that you’re very similar to Harry
206 in the words that you choose for your writing
207 comes out of a lot of the books that you read
208 you actually-
209 you’ve both got very good vocabularies
210 so you choose very good words to put into your work(.)
211 and you’ve gone from having
212 a clear description that everyone understood
213 to actually having a very extended vocabulary
214 so:
215 I was very pleased with the words that you chose
216 maybe you need to kind of
217 do a little bit
218 well like you said there
219 you’ve only got towards the section
220 with the characters
221 when you talked about erm Scarlet and was it her hair
222 Harry: yeah
223 Ms Leigh: that was ideal for the description
224 wouldn’t you say ((pointing at Tamara))
225 Tamara: uhmm
226 Ms Leigh: why
227 what was different
228 Tamara: just (2)
229 just the way (he put it)
230 I can’t really explain
231 Ms Leigh: so hers was
232 ((reading from text)) bellowed Scarlett
233 her simply put up hair
234 brushing to the side because of the cold breeze
235 so it actually tells us more about the character there
236 rather than just saying
237 she’s got hair
238 it’s tells us (what it was like)
239 okay Callum what did you give-
240 oh sorry
241 I shouldn’t do that should I
242 Harry
243 you had two more choices for people who gave you marks
244 Harry: why did you give me a ten out of ten Gina
245 Gina: well because the description was really good
246 and (.) erm
247 instead of using like just
248 hot and sunny
249 you actually use- used like
250 scalding heat blazed and
251 it was really good description
252 and it was very very like
253 like it was like level four or five in vocabulary
254 because it was really really good
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and erm
256 the way you described Scarlett was really really good
257 Ms Leigh: why
258 Gina: what did it do for you as a reader
259 because
260 it makes you think (.) that she like
261 she’s really nice and pretty
262 and erm you-
263 you want to: know more about her
264 because erm like you’ve described her so well
265 Ms Leigh: excellent
266 okay so it does tell you
267 that good description has to give the reader
268 a clear picture inside their mind
269 when I read erm William’s story
270 I knew what was going to happen
271 because we planned it together
272 and when I actually read it
273 it didn’t-
274 he told me he was going to:
275 go into a tunnel of the inky blackness (.)
276 and then I found out nothing else
277 I didn’t know if it was a stone tunnel
278 a concrete tunnel
279 I didn’t know if it was a soil tunnel
280 because he didn’t have that description through there
281 so using those descriptive words
282 to give a picture to the reader
283 right Harry we’ve had
284 a girl and a boy
285 so now somebody else who’s given you
286 not a ten out of ten
287 not a five out of ten
288 [come on who’s going to give Harry some honest feedback
289 [((Callum changes from six fingers to four))
290 Callum: me ((moves hand in Harry’s direction))
291 Harry: er ((looks around the room))
292 William: four ((points to Callum’s hand))
293 (2)
294 Harry: Callum go on then
295 why did you give me a four
296 Callum: er well like
297 you never really explained as much
298 [as like the first one
299 [((Rachel and William raise their hands))
300 Harry: I didn’t get up to there [people
301 Callum: [(yeah but you c-
302 (2)
303 okay
304 you could have like done the characters
305 like you and the teacher or whatever you were
306 [or was you even in it
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307   Harry:  ((looks back at first version of story on his desk))  oh you mean describe the teacher [and stuff
308   Callum:  [yeah
309   Harry:  aw right yeah
310   William:  ((changes from one raised hand to another))  I’ve just got a comment
311   Ms Leigh:  ((to William)) hold on one second
312   ((to Harry)) do you agree
313   Harry:  yeah I–
314   yeah I– I guess so
315   I missed out–
316   all I said is he had a quiet voice and that’s all so
317   I suppose I could have described him a bit better
318   like that he had a like
319   that he had erm (.) thick glasses
320   neatly- neatly thingy
321   side-partin martin
322   and stuff
323   Pupils:  ((Laughter))
324   Ms Leigh  okay
325   using that simple phrase here
326   Scarlett her simply put up hair
327   gives me lots of details about Scarlett
328   because now I can see Scarlett inside my head
329   her hair’s put up
330   so maybe she’s one of these people
331   that likes to be able to
332   run around
333   without having to spend lots time touching her hair and
334   checking she looks right in the reflection
335   you know
336   it tells me that she’s a person that’s
337   maybe clean tidy organised efficient
338   it’s simply put up but she looks quite attractive
339   so she cares about her appearance
340   but not enough to be vain
341   so a simple phrase like that
342   actually helps to give you lots of character details
343   if you’d have said erm
344   the teacher’s placid voice
345   it tells you straight away
346   using the word placid
347   that actually the teacher’s nice and calm
348   just like me hey Callum
349   William &
350   Callum  ((Laughter))
351   Ms Leigh:  if you said
352   the teacher’s placid voice droning on as usual
353   it would have told you two things
354   calm
355   but also
356   really quite boring
357   not like me hey Callum
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359 William & Callum: ((Laughter))
360 Ms Leigh: so
361 using those little character phrases
does help you to give you detail
okay
Karen you haven’t had much to say today
Karen:  erm
well I like the speech tags (1)
I like the adverbs
Ms Leigh: okay tell me
well tell us what you mean by speech tags
because I always say
don’t forget your speech tags
and you go
uh
Pupils: ((Laughter))
Karen:  you know like erm
instead of said
Ms Leigh:  okay
for example
what have we got in here today
that actually caught your imagination
and you thought
oh I’m going to steal that and put that into my work
because your speech tags are good as well
Karen:  bellowed
Ms Leigh: yep definitely
bellowed
and that’s not just a
((said quietly)) what are you doing
or a
((louder and sterner)) what are you doing
or a
((shouting)) what are you doing
Pupils:  (((Laughter)))
William:  [what are you doing
Ms Leigh:  [(xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx isn’t it
it shows you how it’s being said
that’s what we mean by speech tags
okay
I’ll come to you in a second
hands down
because we’re going to run out of time in a moment
we’re thinking about our stories today then
Harry we could’ve-
do we all generally agree
his story improved from yesterday
Pupils:  yeah
William:  ((Clapping))
Ms Leigh:  oh that’s nice
a big round of applause for Harry
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Towards Dialogue Project References:


