

EFFECTIVE TEACHER-LED METALINGUISTIC TALK

Read each of the 4 extracts and look closely at the dialogue, including the teachers' questions, the teachers' responses, and the students' responses. Where can you see examples of effective metalinguistic talk, and where are there aspects of the teacher talk which could have been more effective?

LEARNING CONTEXT:

The students (upper primary) are following a unit of work focused on narrative structure and character development. At the same time, it sets out to introduce children to the richness of Arthurian legend and they share the reading of Michael Morpurgo's re-telling, *Arthur, High King of Britain*.

The talk extracts are taken from different teachers teaching the same two lessons, based on the extract below. They explore how the tension at a key moment in the plot is intensified through a subject-verb inversion and the placing of a short sentence.

'Where is this Excalibur?' I asked yet again. 'And what is it anyway? Can't you tell me?'

'Oh, be still with your questions, Arthur,' said Merlin. Suddenly he leaned forward and pointed. 'Look.'

I looked, but I could see nothing at first. But then as I looked I saw the surface of the lake shiver and break. And, to my amazement, up out of the lake came a shining sword, a hand holding it, and an arm in a white silk sleeve.

'There,' Merlin whispered. 'You have your answer. That is Excalibur. It comes from the half-world of Avalon, the blade forged by elf-kind, the scabbard woven by the Lady Nemue herself, the Lady of the Lake, and my lady too.' And as he spoke her name, his voice faltered. 'See, here she comes.'

And out of the mists came a figure in flowing green, walking across the water. Yet the water seemed undisturbed beneath her feet as if she was walking on air. She came towards us, holding a scabbard in both her hands, and a swordbelt hanging from it.

Extract 1

Teacher: *What is the subject of the sentence?*

Joe: *The sword*

Teacher: *Why do you think he's chosen to do it this way round? Why has he left the shining sword' – the subject - until later in the*

Extract 2

Teacher: *So the verb is in front, but normally we have it after the subject. Why do you think the writer inversed, changed this around?*

Sara: *To make it passive*

Habib: *To bring out Arthur's emotions*

Teacher: *What about us as the reader? How do we read this sentence? How does it sound to you?*

Extract 3 [In answer to the question – what is the shortest sentence here?]

Max: *'That is Excalibur'.*

Teacher: *That's the one I was thinking of. ... What is Excalibur... impact!*

Extract 4: [discussing another student's writing]

Teacher: *Why is that such a good sentence?*

Luca: *They've described it well.*

Teacher: *Yes he has - but from the reader's point of view, what's just happened?*

Luca: *He made the reader wait.*

Teacher: *Good, but how has he done that, what has he done?*

Ambrose: *He put 'the ring of fine gold' at the end. Not until the end of the sentence do we find out what it is.*