Kia Piki
Te Korero
Step Up the Talk
Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank the following people for their huge amount of support and time given in this Innovative Funding Project:

- The entire teaching staff of Glenavon School who undertook all related professional development with eagerness and curiosity, whilst also allowing themselves to be observed and interviewed during busy school days.

- The wonderful students of Glenavon School, who shared their thoughts on their learning with us.

- Educational experts Michael Absolum and Associate Professor Mandia Mentis who supported us over this 18 month project.

- The Ministry of Education, for accepting our proposal and supporting us regularly throughout the last 18 months.

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Kia Piki te Korero:
Step up the talk is an inquiry aimed to raise student achievement in literacy by increasing teacher awareness of their classroom talk, how this impacts on learning and consequent achievement, supported by the Ministry of Education Teacher-Led Innovative Fund Project.

A collaborative partnership was formed between the school’s Management Team, Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour, Massey University and Evaluation Associates to lead the project.

What underpinned the initial design?
The project evolved from three sources: a Masters Research Thesis exploring student’s understanding of feedback (Paul Pirihi, 2014); Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour observations when working with students referred for special learning needs; and discussions with classroom teachers. From this information it was evident that many students at Glen Avon School and in particular students who were making slower progress than their peers, were passive recipients in the learning process.

How did the school decide on this focus?
After observing teachers in their work, school leadership noted that classroom talk was a possible factor that could make a difference for all learners but in particular learners who were working below and well below expectations. Teachers did not seem to be confident in their understanding of feedback to learners and were unfamiliar with the concept of meta-thinking to engage students in the learning process. There seemed to be an underlying assumption that all learners automatically have the thinking structures to make sense of their learning.

What approach did they decide upon?
The aim of the inquiry was to critically reflect on practice and in particular on the talk that teachers were using to engage students in the learning process. The short term intention was to achieve changes in how students talked about their learning as an outcome of teacher talk that described what was being learnt, how it was being learnt, why it was being learnt and where else the learning might be useful. Through this talk the intention was to facilitate student agency, connection and interdependence alongside improved learning outcomes.

What did they do differently?
Through analysis of current practice and coaching for learning focused talk, teachers were supported to become skilful with talk that scaffolded students as thinkers and managers of their learning. This inquiry challenged these assumptions and tested the idea that our below and well below learners may benefit from explicit development of thinking to create meaning by making connections, finding patterns, identifying rules and abstracting thinking principles.

WHAT NEW LEARNING DID THEY DRAW ON TO ADDRESS THEIR CONCERNS?
The leadership team considered a range of research focusing on teacher talk to promote student agency (see Theory and Research).

THEY SET FOUR KEY OBJECTIVES:
• To shift ‘teacher talk’ to explicitly describe the thinking required or learning.
• To engage students in thinking about their learning.
• To improve learning outcomes for students in reading and writing.
• To share with whanau the idea of talk for student agency.

“I always thought that curriculum learning intentions did not really connect to kids. For example what does it mean to make inferences.” (Teacher)

Hattie and Timperley (2007) identified that to be powerful in its effect, feedback must be embedded in learning and teaching contexts where students and teacher have opportunities to engage in dialogue that helps students close the gap between current and desired performance.

“When I teach kids how to think about their learning and then ask them why they are doing it (purpose) and where else they can use it (transcendence). Then I get much better buy in.” (Teacher)

Absolum (2009) identified 4 core principles for effective teaching including building confidence, building on what learners know, making learners partners in the learning and developing learning skills. Key to developing these principles is teacher talk and feedback.
The following research findings have informed the thinking behind the way Kia Piki te Korero developed during the course of the teaching inquiry.

Teachers can maximise the likelihood of students taking responsibility for their learning by working collaboratively to help them understand their learning goals, and by providing opportunity for reflection on progress towards those goals (Muncie, 2000; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Hawe, Dixon & Watson, 2008).

Feuerstein’s (1980) theory of Mediated Learning Experiences (In Mentis, Dunn and Mentis, 2008), highlights the nature of teacher talk to mediate reciprocal engagement, meaning making at the cognitive level and bridging other context. Research using Mediated Learning Experiences and Instrumental Enrichment has demonstrated strong increases in participation and achievement for students with special education needs (Howie, 2003; Howie, Richards & Pirihi, 1993).

Pirihi (2014), explored how Yr5 and 6 students understood and used feedback within their classroom writing programme. He identified that mostly teachers confined their feedback to specifying improvements or specifying attainment, a unidirectional process. Similarly, students expected teachers to explain how they could improve their work and willingly handed ownership of the improvements to the teacher. They viewed feedback as a unidirectional instruction to fix something or to develop their work in a specific way. Pirihi felt that teacher’s in his study were unfamiliar with strategies to scaffold two-way feedback encouraging independence and student ownership.

Chapin, O’Connor and Anderson (2013) have recognised teacher talk as a fundamental instructional tool and they have identified specific ‘talk moves’ to guide teachers’ instructional conversations in maths. In New Zealand the ‘Accelerating Learning in Mathematics’ project is using ‘talk moves’ to engage students in learning conversations and is demonstrating that students who ask the most questions and challenge ideas make the greatest progress in their mathematics learning.

Absolum (2009) identified core principles for effective teaching such as giving learners confidence for success, building on what learners know, making learners partners in the learning and developing learning skill. He identified that key to developing these principles is teacher talk and feedback.

In order to provoke teacher reflection and inquiry into teaching talk and opportunities for student engagement in learning conversations the planning team positioned Feuerstein’s triangle of structured cognitive modifiability within Absolum’s archway of teaching and learning capabilities.

Teachers across the school worked in professional learning groups to inquire into practice and to collect evidence of change. Target students were identified across the school with 3 students in each class. These students were achieving below or well below National Standards in writing and reading. Teachers also identified two other students at random to monitor for comparison purposes.

The spiral of inquiry (Timperley, H., Kaser, L., and Halbert, J., 2014) was used to guide thinking and coaching was used to drive change. Teachers worked in pairs to observe each other and give feedback on the nature of their talk using a planning and feedback template designed to scaffold thinking around Feuerstein’s 12 criteria for mediated learning (Mentis et al. 2008).

Student voice data was collected regularly and was used by teachers to assess the effectiveness of their teacher talk. Teacher Pairs were observed by a Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour and these observations were fed into post observation conversations with peers.

The observation and follow-up conversation identified teacher learning needs and clarifications and this informed follow-up whole team development and expert input. Over time, tools for planning and observing were fine-tuned and rubrics for analysing observations and student interviews were developed.

**THEORY & RESEARCH**

**METHODOLOGY**

**CHANGE MODEL**
TOOL ONE: CRITERIA FOR PLANNING TEACHER TALK

The quality and nature of ‘teacher talk’ was guided by Feuerstein’s (in Mentis 2008), 12 criteria of mediation. When planning lessons teachers focused on specific learning skills related to broader curriculum learning intentions such as I am learning to think in an ordered and systematic way when students are being taught how to organise writing into paragraphs. Teachers used a template (Mentis, M.) to scaffold their planning for focused ‘teacher talk.’ Feuerstein believed that the three essential criteria for mediation (diagram 1) are intentionality and reciprocity, meaning and transcendence. These were the key components of the data gathered in observations, teacher feedback conversations and student interviews. In teacher talk terms these criteria became: What are we learning? How will we learn it? Why are we learning it? and Where else can we use it? Teachers asked these questions to engage students in meaningful conversations about key thinking skills. They challenged and provoked learners to make connections between the thinking focus, the learning activities and the reality of their day to day world.

Teachers worked in pairs to observe each other in the classroom and then feedback observations. Prior to observations teachers shared their intended focus and clearly described their learning intention. The observing teacher then listened for the expression of that learning intention (what?) and the teacher talk that supported student engagement with and understanding of, the learning intention. (How, Why Where else?)

Within 1-2 weeks of the observed lesson students were interviewed to capture their understanding of learning in relation to the teacher’s learning intention. The students were interviewed by the Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour, a person who was familiar to the students but not a regular part of their teaching environment. Students brought samples of their writing to support their recall and thinking about learning intentions.

MEDIATED LEARNING EXPERIENCE (MLE)

Format for planning the learning focus and the opportunities for teacher talk to mediate student learning (Mentis, M.)
Intention And Engagement (understands learning, receptive and involved, open to input, cooperative, motivated)

- **WHAT** are you learning about?
- What is your teacher wanting to teach you?
- This is what you have been doing, what are you learning about?
- HOW will you learn it? What are you doing at the moment?
- How will you know when you have learnt what you are learning about?
- Have you done this learning before? Where?
- On a scale from 1-10 how interesting is this learning at the moment? Why?
- On a scale from 1-10 how hard is this learning at the moment? Why?
- Why do you think you are learning this?

Transcendence (where else it may be useful)

- Where else might you use what you are learning about describing something so others appreciate what you are writing about?

Rubrics were developed to guide judgements about the quality and nature of classroom talk. These rubrics merged ideas from Absolom (2006) and Feuerstein (in Mentis 2008) and reflected similar progressions of talk about learning for teacher and student, with slight changes in wording. Records from teacher observations, teacher feedback conversations and student interviews were analysed against the rubric and scores were allocated for teacher talk and student talk. These scores were tracked over time to capture shifts in teacher and student talk and to enable identification of any emerging patterns.
SCHOOL CONTEXT

About the School

Glenavon School is a decile 1, co-educational, full primary School catering for students from years 1 to 8 from a range of ethnic groups. It is situated in Blockhouse Bay in West Auckland. The school has experienced significant roll growth over the past year.

There are currently 10 classroom teachers involved in Kia Piki te Korero: Step up the talk as well as the Principal, Phil Toomer and Deputy Principal (DP) and lead for the project, Paul Pirihi.

The school’s motto “Working together to make all of our students young achievers” exemplifies the focus of this project. Since Phil was appointed as Principal in 2014, he has led teachers in Professional Learning and Development on Assessment for Learning and has encouraged innovation and further learning with several teachers undertaking professional inquiries at a school-wide level or pursuing academic goals. Paul the DP used his post-graduate studies as a springboard for the current project.

Project Partners

Mandia Menis from Massey University brought her understanding of the Feuerstein model of mediated learning.

Ruth McAllum (RTLB) worked with Mandia to translate this information into tools for planning and analysis and also gathered student and teacher voice.

Ruth and Mandia worked together to train teachers to use a mediated approach to guide students to talk through their thinking about their learning.

Michael Absolum and Heather Barrar supported with data analysis and reporting.

BASELINE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The area of greatest concern at the start of the project was writing where 28% (45) of Pasifika, 17% (9) of Maori and 11% (3) of Asian students were achieving below or well below National Standards. In reading 25% (40) of Pasifika, 13% (7) of Maori and 15% (4) of Asian students were in this group and in Mathematics 19% (31) Pasifika, 6% (3) Maori and 48% (13) Asian students’ achievement was of concern.

Teachers selected five target students from their class to track the success of the project. Three of these students were achieving below or well below the National Standard in reading (junior school) or writing (senior school) and two students were chosen at random to monitor as a comparison.

OUR PRIORITY LEARNERS

The school has a roll of 260 students, 127 of whom are girls and 133 boys.

As with many Auckland schools the students come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The majority of students, 61% are of Pasifika descent, mainly from Samoan and Tongan families.

The second largest group of students are Maori, 20%, and the third are Asian, 10%, again representing a range of different ethnicities.

Inquiry Questions

If teachers engage in Kia Piki te Korero will students talk about their learning in a way that shows they are able to:

- Make things happen even when the learning is challenging?
- Describe what they are learning, how they are learning, why it is important and where else they can use this learning?
- Describe what strong work looks like
- Make judgments about how they are going with their learning?
- Talk and reflect on their thinking as they engage with learning activities?

And will this improve achievement outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics?
We are going back and checking our writing so we can succeed in our writing, we want to hook the reader in and it’s cool to read something that makes sense. (Year 5 student, June 2016)

As I was working I was thinking in my head whether it makes sense (Student Yr 4, March, 2016)

We are actually writing about reporting writing, about the life cycle. Chickens, butterflies. It’s very hard when you finish your plan, it’s hard to know what to write about next. (Student Yr 3, Sept 2015)

I am learning about key words so I can learn very well... I just needed to look at the picture and then when you looked at that you can read key words..... we learned about sense, about making sense with a story with the key words (Student Yr 1 Dec 2015)

We are learning about describing... using metaphors and similies... I use like and sometimes I don’t use like... I can use it maybe at home like a challenge with your brothers and sisters – like when you describe your friends (Student Yr 5 Mar 2016).
DATA SHIFTS

Shifts In Teacher Talk & Student’s Thinking
The rubrics designed to capture shifts in student’s thinking and teacher talk used different numbers of indicators for each area of focus. To accurately compare shifts across them, all scores were converted to percentages before being averaged to look at progress over the five terms of the project.
The charts below show an upward trend in all aspects measured for both students and their teachers:

Achievement Shifts
The following charts show shifts in achievement. The first shows OTJs comparing all students with those achieving at or above National Standards. The second chart shows average e-asTTle scores for targeted students in year 5 or above in writing. The third chart shows shifts in reading level for targeted students in year 4 or below projected to the end of the year.

ANALYSIS

Teacher talk and student thinking
Average teacher progress over the project varied across the different areas of teaching focus. As this data was gathered through observations, it represents a ‘slice in time’ measure, indicating the particular focus and level of talk in specific lessons. There was, however, clear improvement over time as teachers became more conversant in their understanding and use of talk to enhance students thinking about their learning. The average shift across all focus areas, as indicated in the single line chart, indicates a steep shift in teacher talk over time, levelling off toward the end of the project as many teachers internalized and became consistent in their use of the strategies.

Students’ progress across all focus areas was more steady and incremental than that of teachers. It was representative of the cumulative development in their thinking over time. The upward trend in their thinking, while not as marked at that of teacher talk, nevertheless shows their increasing grasp of the purpose and application of their learning. This is affirmed by the single line graph showing average shift across all areas. It is likely that student thinking grew stronger in response to increasing teacher use of focused talk.

The relationship between teacher and student shifts will be explored in more depth in the ‘Teacher and Student Stories’ and ‘Insights’ sections of this document.
This profile of change shows my growth as a teacher and my target students growth across the four areas of teaching focus: what we are learning, how we are learning it, why we are learning it and where else we can use it. My shifts in teacher talk were mirrored by similar shifts with student talk. As my talk became more focused, it was interesting to see that my students also reported higher levels of interest and engagement. Over the 5 data points, my teacher talk shifted from a knowledge based learning conversation to a thinking based conversation. The more I shifted my talk away from a knowledge intention to a thinking intention the easier it became to engage students in deep conversation about their learning. Together we were able to construct understanding of the thinking we were using and how it could be useful in the wider context of our lives. As I defined the learning intention more meaningfully, it became easier to plan purposeful learning experiences. Classroom activities shifted from attention grabbing to be attention grabbing and reinforcing of the thinking. My teaching seemed richer and very satisfying.

SEPT 2015
What: Sugar is not good for our bodies
How: Watch video
Why: To help us with healthy choices
Where else: Use information in our presentations

MAR 2016
What: Sort through info in order to put pieces together as a recount
How: Read/reread, peer share and compare relevant info, sequence ideas
Why: To make sense and write interesting recounts
Where else: At uni and when doing my homework

JUNE 2016
What: Checking and improving
How: Read it over and over, buddy check, look carefully
Why: To hook the reader in and it’s cool to read something that makes sense
Where else: Checking food in cupboard to make sure it doesn’t go bad, Mum and dad checking on kids at night

“A kind of like learning this way because it helps me with my learning and when I grow up I can get a job for my family.”

NOV 2015
What: Follow steps and you always have to listen because if you don’t you won’t get it and it won’t work out the way you want it to be.
How: Write the date and the title
Why: So you know what to do
Where else: Umm oh if you have
When you describe the food on the menu so people might try

“A kind of like learning this way because it helps me with my learning and when I grow up I can get a job for my family.”

MAR 2016
What: She wants us to describe
How: By writing about when was it, what you did, how and who and which was your favourite part. Write your ideas, using describing words
Why: So the reader can know what you are talking about
Where else: if you ring up the police or someone and you can describe that person if someone has been mean to you and you don’t know the name

“A kind of like learning this way because it helps me with my learning and when I grow up I can get a job for my family.”

AUG 2016
What: Describing, writing and using interesting words
How: My friends tell me if it is an interesting word. I put words that describe the character and main part
Why: When you use good describing, people are interested in the story.
Where else: in a restaurant when you describe the food on the menu so people might try to get it.

“It is easy for me because I get to think of what I am learning and then I write it down.”

“It is interesting to know how a story is made using describing words. I found describing words in the story I was reading.”
THE INSIDE STORY

The previous stories demonstrate general upwards trends for teacher talk, student talk and achievement. Teacher development led to student development and this was replicated across all classes. Where teacher development fluctuated, then student development fluctuated as demonstrated in the following graphs that represent the story of two teachers and a student.

The teacher change profile shows that there was a change of teacher between 2015 and 2016. The 2016 teacher was also new to the school and had not been exposed to initial development of our ideas with a consequent break in progress as shown in the graph. When we compare the teacher change profile with the student change profile we can see a falling away of teacher talk at the beginning of 2016 with a consequent pause in student progress visible as a general fluctuation of progress. It is interesting to note that not all areas of talk were affected and that the student maintained her development of what from the previous year’s teacher. The graphs also show the effect of life moments that disrupted the pattern. For example, the student in the diagram was having a bad day in the term 2, 2016 observation and was reprimanded by the teacher resulting in attitude issues that were evident in student voice data. This was reflected in the student change profile as a downward shift in reciprocity (motivation and engagement) the light blue line on the graph.

Change is often not a tidy process yet we tend to analyse change processes in a way that gives the impression of orderliness. The graphs present a linear view for change but the patterns of change and the underpinning dimensions of change were complex. Our rubrics tracked these complexities and although they are still a work in progress they enabled us to see emerging patterns while also providing feedback for teachers.

The rubrics focused our attention on the detail of our talk.

The rubrics also captured the pattern of growth for analytical talk as teachers interrogated their practices. The rubrics show that teachers quickly grasped the idea of learning intentions that focused thinking about thinking capabilities and they were able to adjust their talk to be precise in describing these through the what. But realising the importance of analysing thinking capabilities and identifying strategies and rules for engagement with the thinking capability - how, why and where else - took longer to embed as demonstrated in the overall shifts in teacher talk. Our discussions showed that teachers struggled with meaningful talk about the how, why and where else until they had a strong grasp of the what. The component of the what that needed to be carefully understood was identifying the thinking focus. Teachers needed to see that if a learning intention was’ I am learning to write the first paragraph of my recount’ there were a number of possible ‘whats’ for mediation depending on the needs of the student. For example I am learning to gather information to think of key ideas, I am learning to select relevant words, I am learning to compare more than 1 idea and choose the most important idea. The highlighted thinking capabilities then guide planning for how, why and where else. Identifying the thinking capability and being able to talk about the what in a precise and detailed way seems to be key to shifting talk about the meaning of learning and applicability to other areas of life experience.

“So one thing that I really got out of it was that I could use it to simplify what I wanted kids to learn and not only was it more simple and in kids speak, there was that transcendence where the kids were able to connect what we were doing outside of the activity we were doing, and with that I got a lot of those aha moments in teaching.”

THE SECRET OF WHAT
The entire Glenavon community were introduced to the ‘Step up the Talk’ project at a school hui in early February, 2016. Paul Pirih shared the purpose of the project and spoke about the importance of students having a ‘voice’ in their learning and them being a part of the learning process alongside the teacher. He spoke about how the project was going to run over 2016 and how it was vital that parents talked to their children at home about what they learnt that day at school, how that learning might be used to help them in their future – explaining each of these areas in depth.

Parents were surveyed that evening and asked if:

- Their child could talk to them about WHAT they were learning.
- Their child could tell them HOW they learn.
- Their child could tell them WHY they learn.
- Their child could tell them how this learning may help them in their future.

The same parents were asked the same questions in late November so we could look into the results for any shifts.

### Links to Whānau

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### Insights

At the beginning of the project we asked ourselves if teachers engage in Kia Piki te Korero will students talk about their learning in a way that shows they are able to:

- Make things happen even when the learning is challenging.
- Describe what they are learning, how they are learning, why it is important and where else they can use this learning.
- Describe what strong work looks like.
- Make judgments about how they are going with their learning.
- Talk and reflect on their thinking as they engage with learning activities.
- And will this improve achievement outcomes in reading and writing.

We are now able to say that:

- Teacher talk contributes to improved learner achievement in writing: effect size for the data in this project is 0.64.
- Changes in teacher talk are reflected in changes in student talk.
- Teachers are able to make stronger learning connections when talking about thinking skills as opposed to learning intentions.
- Students are able to talk more expansively about thinking skills as opposed to learning intentions.
- Teacher talk that explicitly describes and expands student understanding of the thinking capabilities required for a learning outcome, leads to expanded student talk about their learning and students are able to talk about usefulness of learning in different context.
- Student uptake of teacher talk is influenced by the teacher’s clarity of focus and their deliberate direction of learners’ attention to the purpose of learning and the identification of thinking principles to be generalised to other context.
- Student uptake of teacher talk is influenced by environmental and emotional factors.
- Development of teacher and student talk happens in a pattern. It starts with a sharpening of talk to clearly describe learning intentions, followed by talk to explore meaning and generalisation, then teachers realise the need to further unpack learning intentions to identify and describe specific thinking skills.
- Teachers find it easier to initially talk with students about thinking skills, then using kid speak they are able to link this understanding to curriculum learning intentions.
- When teacher talk makes sense and is connected to thinking, students also talk about thinking and this seems to impact on engagement and achievement.
- Teacher talk about thinking capabilities encourages classroom learning conversations to co-construct understanding.
- Teaching inquiry, peer coaching and student voice data are great tools for change. Teachers describe profound impacts on their teaching and changes to the ecology of classrooms have been observed.
- The Feuerstein triangle and in particular the criteria for mediation, give a strong framework for teacher reflection and interrogation of their work.

One of the learning intentions was learning to analyse a text and we called it looking closely at information at first and then when they got used to doing and talking about that skill then we called it learning how to analyse text.

The ideas for the classroom focus have come from the students’ work. Being precise came out of students’ work where their writing didn’t make sense. Some children needed to be more aware of being precise in reading as they were reading without thinking about what they were reading.

Our focus has been to explain clearly and to say what we mean and it is successful in that children understand and talk about the direction of their learning.

### Table

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEBRUARY</th>
<th>NOVEMBER</th>
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<td>My child can tell WHAT they are learning.</td>
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<td>Confident – 61%</td>
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<td>Sometimes 31%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 7%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Cannot – 3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>My child can tell HOW they are learning.</td>
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<td>Confident – 55%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sometimes – 35%</td>
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<td>My child can tell WHY they are learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My child can talk to me about TRANSCENDENCE (how this learning might help them in their future).</td>
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References


