

## Pupil talk – Tell-each-other

Pupils would talk all the time if we let them. The secret is to make this as useful as possible. Many lessons contain question and answer sessions where the pupils listen as the teacher goes round the class. Except for the child actually speaking, the class is passive, hopefully (!) trying to make sense of the words but unable to try out their own ideas. A few pupils will be rehearsing answers, and putting up their hands. Many will be afraid that they'll be asked and have nothing to say. A few may not care one way or another and be ready with the response 'I don't know, Miss'.

This sort of questioning happens in many science classrooms all over the country: good 'Socratic' questioning, with one pupil talking and 29 listening. How can we improve this so that everyone has the chance to talk – so everyone has the opportunity to make their own sense of what is being taught by trying to explain it to someone, but without the class becoming chaotic?

When you ask a question you will usually wait for hands to go up. We are urged to include a 'wait time' of 10 seconds and then ask someone (not always the ones with their hands raised). But there are 10 seconds of silence, with a few pupils thinking of what they might say and most afraid they will be asked.

Instead, try saying:

'Tell each other what you think ... (makes the bulb light up).' At KS 1 and 2 you can say 'Whisper to your neighbour...'

... and give them 10 seconds of talk, not silence. Half the pupils will have an idea and tell their partner (a few may be off task all together). You then say 'Quiet now, please: hands up those who have an idea' or simply choose people to respond. After hearing each response, you say 'Hands up those who agree?' 'Are there any other ideas?'

Here are some advantages over the hands-up technique, which you can compare with the responses from your trainee teachers when you ask them:

- every child has the chance to rehearse their answer (verbally) to their partner, before having to speak it out in class – far more pupils become willing to put up their hands to reply.
- How many disappointed looks do you get when a child is 'bursting' to tell you the answer, and you choose someone else? They can now turn to their partner and nod as if to say 'I knew that, didn't I?'
- Rehearsing their response means they can compare what they thought with the answers that are given. If they have not understood, they will become aware of this and try to make sense of their confusion.

It really only works if you restrict the time to *10 seconds*. If you give more time it is better to call it group discussion, and they will be given a more structured task.

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### Download 3.1 'Tell-each-other'

Pupil *talk* must come before they write: they must be given the chance to make their own sense of the new ideas in the lesson. *Tell each other* is the simplest and quickest way to do this. If the active talking activities involving the whole class needs more than the 10-second time-span, you need to provide more structure. The key to successful discussion (or any activity) is the *tight control of time* – set a series of short do-able tasks.

Taken from Chapter 8 Children learning through talking (pp 62-3) of  
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