

## Early Career Framework

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# Core Induction Programme

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- > Week 5: Developing high-quality classroom talk

Week

# 5: Developing high-quality classroom talk

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## Session Elements

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- self-assessment
- independent planning

## Learning Intentions for this session

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**You will learn that:**

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**4.7** High-quality classroom talk can support pupils to articulate key ideas, consolidate understanding and extend their vocabulary.

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**4.9** Paired and group activities can increase pupil success, but to work together effectively pupils need guidance, support and practice.

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**4.10** How pupils are grouped is also important; care should be taken to monitor the impact of groupings on pupil attainment, behaviour and motivation.

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# Introduction

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You have been looking at the importance of explicitly teaching metacognitive strategies and how you can support pupils by narrating thought processes aloud when modelling, making the steps in a process memorable and exposing potential pitfalls.

This work built on your earlier learning, where you explored the importance of good modelling in helping pupils to understand new processes and ideas and the importance of guides, scaffolds and worked examples in developing pupil expertise.

In this self-study session you will extend your knowledge of the importance of high-quality classroom talk (which you last looked at in Module 2) in order to help pupils to articulate key ideas, extend their vocabulary and consolidate their understanding of key knowledge and processes. You will also consider how thoughtful grouping of pupils can be a powerful tool for supporting more effective learning.

You can apply insights from these exercises to examples from your own past experience with pupils, and to future lesson plans.

## Research and Practice Summary

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This reading will help you understand some of the theory behind this week's topic. We will start by introducing some of the key concepts (these are in bold). You will also see some suggestions of how to put these concepts into practice. **When using these concepts in your own practice, you will need to take account of your pupils' characteristics, the context of your classroom and the nature of the material that you are teaching.**

### Collaborative classroom talk – Year 11 geography

In Sarah's Year 11 geography lesson, she wanted her pupils to think hard about different economic and social measures of development (gross national income (GNI) per head, birth and death rates, infant mortality, life expectancy, people per doctor, literacy rates, access to safe water, Human Development Index (HDI)) and the limitations of using these economic and social measures.

The class contains 25 mixed-attainment pupils. The teacher has been trying to encourage effective collaborative talk throughout a range of

different tasks during the year.

### **How might Sarah make use of the strategies in this summary?**

Collaborative learning and dialogue are both effective ways of developing pupils' learning at different stages, but are particularly helpful in supporting your pupils with practice. The evidence also highlights the importance of explicitly teaching and supporting both collaborative learning and classroom talk.

**Collaborative learning** involves pupils working together, in pairs or small groups, where everyone can participate in a collective activity. This may involve each pupil taking responsibility for a part of the activity or all pupils working together on the same activity. The impact of collaborative learning approaches is typically positive, but studies find a wide range of effects. This suggests that it is important to consider how to do it most effectively.

To help you to establish collaborative learning that is effective and efficient, you should:

- provide support and practice – effective collaborative learning requires more than just asking pupils to work together (e.g. explicitly teach routines and expectations, and repeat these each time you ask your pupils to work collaboratively)
- carefully design tasks – collaborative learning will be ineffective if tasks are not designed so that pupils can work together effectively and efficiently. If this is not done, some pupils may opt to try and work alone (e.g. provide specific roles and responsibilities; rotate these so that the same pupils don't get type-cast in the same roles; to avoid drifting off task, be strict on timing and clear about expected outcomes)
- carefully group pupils – one of the benefits of collaborative learning is that pupils of different attainment levels can benefit from working with each other. Give consideration to the impact of specific grouping on behaviour and motivation (e.g. before grouping by friendship, ask yourself if this is likely to help or hinder their work)
- use competition purposefully – competition can be an effective way of enhancing collaborative learning. However, it is not essential and it is likely to be unhelpful if competition becomes a distraction from the intended learning. (Carefully monitoring the impact of competition is likely to be useful: not all pupils respond positively to competition)

**Which of these strategies might Sarah consider essential for her geography class, and which might she think are desirable? Which might she avoid?**

**Classroom talk** refers to the use of vocabulary and the quality of discussion by pupils as well as teachers. Encouraging pupils to use specific vocabulary and terminology during discussion in class helps to normalise and embed new words and improve the development of deep understanding. It broadens pupils' vocabulary and helps them to articulate high-level ideas. Spoken language underpins both reading and writing development. Quality pupil talk positively affects academic attainment across the curriculum and children's social and emotional development.

To help develop quality classroom talk, you should:

- carefully consider how ground rules and pupil reflection can help build a supportive environment for talk (e.g. by agreeing on class rules for talk and keeping them on display)
- create shared expectations and routines, such as listening to and respecting everyone, to support high-quality classroom talk (e.g. introducing specific frameworks and approaches that pupils can use to guide their talk. This may be as simple as providing specialist vocabulary or sentence stems to develop pupils' thinking)
- model polite, constructive talk by insisting on rules for turn-taking. (This can be more than 'hands up' – for example, it could include handovers such as 'I agree with Sara because... I would like to challenge what Sami said...')

## **What Sarah did with her Year 11 geographers – Sarah explains her thinking**

'I have been trying to encourage effective collaborative talk throughout a range of different tasks during the year. In GCSE geography, it's a great way to get pupils to articulate the key ideas, consolidate their understanding and extend their vocabulary, because they have to explain their thinking to their peers.

'Mine is a mixed-attainment group; I have to pay close attention to the impact my groupings have on pupil attainment, their behaviour and motivation. I have a couple of pupils with tricky behaviour in there: they respond much better when they are familiar with routines. So, at the start of the year, I set up a system of grouping pupils into one of five 'home' and 'away' discussion groups. The 5 'home' groups were named after continents, and the 'away' groups were named after ecosystems. The pupils had their 'home' and 'away' group name written on the front of their file. The 'home' groups were mixed attainment groups, whereas the 'away' groups were based on prior attainment levels. In order to do this I also had to take into account the pupils' prior knowledge of the topic. The pupils feel a sense of responsibility towards their groups, which I occasionally

reinforce with competition. I am certain this has boosted their intrinsic motivation.

‘I never do collaborative work just for the sake of it: it must always be about thinking harder about and achieving a deeper understanding of the subject and the exam. For this, they need guidance, support and practice. So, in the first stage of the lesson on different economic and social measures of development, pupils worked in ‘home’ groups. They were given a range of keywords, definitions and pictures which exemplified the core concepts of the lesson. Once they had developed their understanding of these concepts, I questioned the different groups about each measure of development to further embed their understanding. In the second phase of the lesson I told them to move into their away groups. At this point I gave a series of differentiated questions set to challenge the different prior attainment groups in the class. In the final stages of the lesson, I asked them to create their own ‘best’ measure of development.’

## **Ben, an A-Level history teacher, shares another approach to high-quality group talk**

**The issue:** In A-Level history, pupils are required to make judgements about the validity of general statements and the claims of other historians. My Year 12s were preparing for an essay answering the question “Was Henry VIII’s foreign policy from 1509-1527 a success?”

**How he grouped them:** I put pupils into groups of mixed ability based on how they had tackled their previous essay. Person 1 in each group had the weakest skills in this area, Person 4 had the strongest.

We used the following scaffold to structure discussion.

‘What would “success” look like for Henry VIII in terms of his foreign policy 1509–1527?’

1. Suggest a definition for success.
2. Ask a question about the definition – Person 1 should respond to your question.
3. Suggest a change to the definition in the light of this discussion.
4. Ask a further question about the definition and then draft a final definition which the whole group should then agree before all writing down an answer.

**How he modelled group talk:** As this was a skill that was not yet totally embedded with this class, I had already scripted an exemplar discussion using a similar question about ‘Henry VII’s foreign policy’ and we modelled this with one of the groups. This helped to re-activate prior knowledge, provided some guidance about the types of comments that could be made and gave additional support to pupils who were not confident about the process.

**Why it was successful:** The success of the essay would rely on pupils understanding the different concepts involved in this task. It doesn’t focus specifically on knowledge – although a different task could – as this will be the next stage in the process (having defined success – was it actually a success?). (4.7)

By using the 1–4 approach and assigning different tasks or roles to each number it was possible to provide relevant challenge and support for each pupil based on their prior attainment. (4.10) This grouping was carefully assigned based on prior assessment and a secure knowledge of pupil ability in relation to this particular skill. (4o)

Providing a scaffold for discussion meant that all pupils were clear about their role in the discussion and it was clear that all pupils had a key role to play in the success of the activity. (4.9) Once pupils are confident with this approach (as a result of opportunities to practise) then it may not be necessary to include the worked examples as part of the set-up and ultimately, pupils should be able to have these discussions without using the scaffold.

In addition to ensuring that all pupils were involved, this scaffold and the modelled approach increased the quality of discussion and the rigour of the dialogue as pupils were able to question, challenge assumptions and re-frame in the light of other people’s input. (4p)

## Self-Study Activities

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### Review: 10 mins

Read the Research and Practice Summary on this week’s topic. As you read, reflect on:

1. the practices that you are already doing well
2. the practices you are doing some of the time, but could do more of/more consistently

### 3. the practices you don't use in your teaching yet

## Plan: 10 mins

### Self-assessment

In your context, consider how effectively you use classroom talk and how effective your guidance of paired/group activities is. For each of these statements, place a cross on the line to best reflect your current practice. You could either do this for a single lesson/single class or for your teaching as a whole.

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Classroom talk is always carefully structured and modelled, and has a focused purpose. Consideration is made to its specific purpose or structure



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Pupils are given the opportunity to experience and develop a wide range of skills related to classroom talk (e.g. listening, questioning, summarising, and justifying)



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Pupils are given an opportunity to talk about processes and knowledge before reading or writing. Consideration is made to its specific purpose or structure



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Paired or group tasks are carefully structured and modelled to maximise opportunities for learning. (E.g. 'Person A, you are the speaker – talk for 30 seconds about x. Person B, you are the questioner. Listen carefully and then ask two questions about what Person A said'.)



Summarise your reflections from this activity in your Learning Log. If you have considered one class or group of pupils, do you think that your responses would be the same when considering a different group?

## Theory to Practice: 20 mins

### 1. Independent planning

Planning for different groupings. Perhaps, in your self-assessment above, you said you ‘rarely’ give opportunities for structured classroom talk, or for collaborating in different grouping; or perhaps you said you ‘always’ do. You are now going to plan a lesson in two different ways. Use this opportunity to experiment a little:

- Think about a lesson that you will be delivering next week with a particular group of pupils.
- With a clear learning intention in mind produce two different ways of grouping your pupils (e.g. mixed attainment or near-attainment? Mixed gender or single gender? All in pairs, or all in fours? Or home and away groups, like Sarah?)
- Think about how the size of the groups and their prior attainment may affect motivation and behaviour.
- For each grouping, summarise your thinking behind the grouping and what you intend the outcomes to be for each group/sub-set of pupils.

An interesting development here would be to try and create the worst possible groupings and explain why these groupings might not work – in doing this you will be considering (and then ignoring) all of the key considerations for effective group work. We are not suggesting that you should teach this deliberately poorly grouped lesson!

### Next Steps: 5 mins

Be ready to share this, and your other learning from this session, with your mentor in your next meeting with them.



[Previous Week — 4: Modelling metacognitive strategies \(https://www.early-career-framework.education.gov.uk/ucl/ucl/2-understanding-teachers-as-role-models/3-developing-quality-pedagogy/4-modelling-metacognitive-strategies/\)](https://www.early-career-framework.education.gov.uk/ucl/ucl/2-understanding-teachers-as-role-models/3-developing-quality-pedagogy/4-modelling-metacognitive-strategies/)

[Next Week — 8: Using groupings to support specific needs](#) 



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