

About ground rules for talk

Resource theme: Dialogue in student groups

Resource type: Core Reading

Time required: 10 minutes

'About ground rules for talk' discusses how, for successful group work, students in a class must collectively agree a set of 'Ground Rules for Talk' in order to encourage effective, reasoned Exploratory Talk.

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About ground rules for talk

Adapted from the [Thinking Together](#) resources (Dawes, 2016)

Initial Talk Lessons are designed to encourage an awareness of the power of productive talk in groups. Educationally effective talk has been called 'Exploratory Talk'. Exploratory talk supports *interthinking* and happens when all members of a group contribute their opinions and reasons for opinions. Group members respect one another and listen actively. Challenge and reasoned argument is deliberately sought as a way of gaining insight and understanding of other points of view. The members of the group are open to new ideas and are prepared to negotiate and change their mind if influenced by the suggestions of others. The entire group takes responsibility for any decision or action taken. Exploratory talk is thus characterised by such phrases as:

what do you think...? why...?
I think that.....because...
if.....but.....I know...
shall we...?
do you remember...?
what do you mean...?
any other ideas...?
Do we all agree...?

It is critically important, for the success of subsequent group work, that the class agrees a set of 'Ground Rules for Talk' which encourage effective, reasoned Exploratory Talk. They then need to monitor their group interactions in relation to these ground rules.

Ground Rules which have been found to support Exploratory Talk are:

- All relevant information is shared amongst the group
- Assertions and opinions should be backed up by reasons
- Suggestions and opinions can be challenged and discussed
- Alternative options are considered before any decision is made
- Everyone in the group should be encouraged to speak by the other members
- The group works towards reaching agreement
- The group accepts collective responsibility for decisions made and actions taken because of those decisions

It is important that each class feels ownership of and commitment to their set of ground rules. The class ground rules should ideally reflect those above without being copied from them – the boxed information is ‘for your eyes only’.

The principles above may have to be disentangled from other rules for talk in class that pupils will have learnt, or at least heard of, such as 'Don't use bad language' and 'Don't talk in assembly'. Although useful, these rules are not relevant to the ability to sustain educationally effective discussion, with its focus on reasoned argument and shared information.