

How can we increase pupils' participation in learning by promoting their interactions with each other?

Research evidence

Eliciting ground rules for talk in pupils' own words is particularly helpful for encouraging pupils to draw other, perhaps quieter pupils into the group's discussion. During a guided discussion, the teacher draws from the class the kind of rules they think should be used in group work and displays the resulting list on the wall for pupils to refer to. Such rules can include the need to:

- ask everyone for their opinion
- ask for reasons why
- respect other people's ideas – don't just use your own, and
- make sure everyone agrees after talking

Your evidence

Try exploring evidence about how your pupils behave during group work. You could use the questions below as a framework to analyse what happens. Or you might like to ask a trusted colleague or even a group of pupils to observe a group work activity in one of your lessons and give you detailed information about the extent to which pupils:

- Take turns or do they frequently talk over each other or interrupt?
- Invite contributions from each other (including asking for explanations)?
- Listen to each other, and respond and react to each other's contributions?
- Elaborate their contributions by providing reasons, explanations, and examples?
- Pool ideas before reaching a group decision?

See overleaf for an idea about how you might collect this evidence. How do you feel about what you have discovered? Are there any surprises? What is similar and different for different groups of pupils e.g. boys and girls, shyer and less forthcoming pupils?

Next steps

Using yours or your colleague's or your pupils' observations, can you identify strengths and weaknesses in group work behaviour in your classes? Could you use your evidence as a focus for a discussion about group work with your pupils? Would it be helpful to model the specific aspects of group work that you want to strengthen? You might want to develop rules which support pupils in incorporating these behaviours into their discussions.

Find out more

- Participation anthology RfT Section 1, page 3 available at <http://www.tla.ac.uk/site/SiteAssets/Anthologies/06RE079%20Pupil%20participation%20anthology.pdf>
- RfT: Raising achievement through group work available at <http://www.tla.ac.uk/site/SiteAssets/RfT1/06RE034%20Raising%20achievement%20through%20group%20work.pdf>

This is based on a taster developed by CUREE for the TLA.
For further practitioner friendly resources, visit www.curee.co.uk

Gathering your evidence

You might want to use a table like the one below to collect your evidence. Tick the box on the scale for each pair of statements to indicate how you would best describe the lesson.

pupils interrupt each other and/ or talk over each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	pupils take turns to speak
pupils do not invite contributions from each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	pupils frequently invite contributions from each other (e.g. 'What do you think?', 'Does anyone else have a different idea?')
pupils do not ask each other for explanations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	pupils frequently ask for explanations from each other (e.g. 'Tell me why you think that.')
pupils do not listen to others' contributions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	pupils listen to others' contributions (demonstrating this through body language and verbally) and react to the contributions (e.g. 'I agree with ...', 'I've got a different viewpoint.'
pupils do not elaborate their contributions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	pupils frequently elaborate their contributions by providing reasons, explanations, and examples
pupils do not pool ideas before reaching a decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	pupils pool all of their ideas and weigh them up before making a decision