

MENTOR HANDBOOK

B11 | BEHAVIOUR: PAIRS AND GROUPS

STUDY

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THIS MODULE

Your teacher can support talk that enables effective pair and group work by understanding that:

- > There are behavioural challenges particular to group and paired work. Teachers can pre-empt them by pre-planning groupings, and sharing and checking behavioural expectations and practice.
- > Effective talk tasks support pupils to talk successfully if they avoid overloading pupil working memory so pupils can articulate key ideas, consolidate understanding and extend their vocabulary.
- > Teachers can support pupils to manage their behaviour and learning during collaboration.

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**READ THE EVIDENCE
SUMMARY BELOW:**

TEACHING CHALLENGE

Ms Silva can keep pupils on task when they practise independently. There are times when she feels it could be valuable for pupils to work in pairs or groups, but she is frustrated that pupils can go off task or produce poor work when she allows them to talk. How can she manage the way pupils conduct discussions so they get maximum learning benefit from collaboration?

KEY IDEA

Teachers need to prepare for and intentionally support behaviours that enable quality pupil talk.

GETTING PUPIL BEHAVIOUR RIGHT IN TALK TASKS

At the heart of pair and group work is effective pupil talk. High-quality discussions help pupils better understand what they already know by articulating their thoughts more clearly (EEF, 2018). Peer discussion is also beneficial for building vocabulary, and aids social and linguistic development (Alexander, 2017).

However, when pupils work with their peers it can give rise to behavioural issues, as pupils may get distracted or be unable to complete a task. Just as when introducing other classroom routines, teachers should anticipate and plan to avoid behavioural problems (Kern & Clemens, 2007). To promote on-task talk, Ms Silva can:

- > **Outline behavioural expectations:** Where appropriate share specific words to try to use, time limits and rules for turn taking. The EEF (2018) provide an example of rules for discussion.
- > **Explain why these behaviours are important:** If pupils know why something is effective, they're more likely to do it properly and be more motivated to do the hard thinking expected of them (Coe et al., 2014; EEF, 2017).
- > **Check understanding:** To succeed, pupils need to understand behavioural expectations and task instructions (Rosenshine, 2012).
- > **Practise routines:** Pupils become more automatic and fluent through practice, so Ms Silva can ensure pupils talk successfully by regularly practising talk routines (Rosenshine, 2012).

Ms Silva should pre-plan groupings, as pupil groupings can affect pupil motivation and behaviour (Tereshchenko et al., 2018). She may wish to get pupils to work in pairs first, as this will help pupils to practise routines, behaviours and strategies of discussion, making it more likely pupils will talk successfully before working in larger groups. Once pupils are on task and thinking hard in pairs, she might start to trial group work – but only if she is confident that this will benefit learning. In short, Ms Silva should take an intentional approach to grouping pupils.

PREPARING TALK TASKS THAT SUPPORT PUPIL LEARNING

As well as getting the behaviour right, Ms Silva needs to ensure pupils have the best chance of learning successfully from talk. Pupils need to understand the goals of the task in relation to their learning. Because we 'learn what we think hard about' (Coe, 2013), Ms Silva's aim should be to get all pupils to think hard about important content during talk tasks. However, Ms Silva needs to balance this with ensuring that her pupils experience success, as this is critical for motivation and learning (Coe et al., 2014; Rosenshine, 2012).

A key factor in ensuring pupils think hard and experience success is teaching in ways that avoid overloading pupil working memory (Dean for Impact, 2015). Ms Silva's talk tasks are more likely to succeed if she:

- > Makes the tasks themselves simple, while keeping the content challenging (Gathercole et al., 2006). For example, using tasks with minimal steps.
- > Builds on existing pupil knowledge (Deans for Impact, 2015).
- > Provides enough guidance and support, for example, scaffolding (Rosenshine, 2012).

High-quality classroom talk can support pupils to articulate key ideas, consolidate understanding and extend their vocabulary. Knowledgeable pupils are likely to get more insights from discussing their existing knowledge than they could without discussion (Kirschner et al., 2018). Therefore, Ms Silva should consider when in the learning sequence she introduces talk tasks, as they are likely to be more effective after behavioural expectations become embedded and pupil knowledge increases.

SUPPORTING PUPILS TO MANAGE THEIR LEARNING IN TALK TASKS

Having prepared tasks that support on-task behaviour and learning, how can Ms Silva now manage pupils during talk tasks? She can:

- > **Circulate:** Ensuring pupils are on task and not struggling (Rosenshine, 2012).
- > **Support:** Directing pupil attention to available scaffolding (Van der Pol et al., 2015).
- > **Reinforce:** Using praise, rewards and sanctions to reinforce desired behaviours (IES, 2008).

The preparation Ms Silva has done should support pupils to self-manage their behaviour and learn more effectively. This will allow Ms Silva to focus more on supporting pupil learning and less on managing off-task behaviour during paired and group talk.

NUANCES AND CAVEATS

It is best when pupils are taught new knowledge before introducing pair or group work. They may struggle if peer collaboration is introduced too early in the learning sequence.

While it is possible for teachers to pick up on pupil misconceptions during pupil discussions, this is not likely to be the quickest or most efficient way of checking for understanding: strong whole-class questioning might be more effective. Discussions are best used to help pupils organise their knowledge.

Ability grouping shows limited evidence of impact on pupil outcomes (Coe et al., 2014). Ms Silva must ensure the groups pupils are placed in don't negatively affect pupil attainment, behaviour and motivation. Ms Silva should ensure her within-class pupil groups are flexible and that she continuously considers whether pupils are in a group because this is an effective way of tailoring support for an identified pupil need e.g. ensuring groups based on attainment are subject specific and changing groups regularly, avoiding the perception that groups are fixed.

SELECT

Before you observe, first select a **DEVELOPMENT AREA** to focus on. Next, familiarise yourself with the **FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREAS**, as you will zoom in on one of these during your observation. Finally, craft a **PRECISE TARGET** when you observe your teacher (examples are provided below).

DEVELOPMENT AREA	FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA	EXAMPLE PRECISE TARGETS
Planning for purposeful pair and group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher, with support of a colleague, decides when it is appropriate to use pair and group work and how much time to spend on pair and group work, e.g. when pupils have the necessary prior knowledge and there is a clear purpose, such as consolidating the material, clear articulation of ideas or extending vocabulary. > Teacher, with the support of a colleague, plans which pupils will work together purposefully and supportively for pair and group work and reviews pairs and groups to ensure they are changed regularly. > Teacher plans and explicitly states what they want pupils to achieve during the pair or group work and (if appropriate) how they expect them to feedback what they have discussed or done. 	
Clear expectations for pair and group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher clearly states their behavioural expectations for the speaker and listener(s) and the task instructions for the pair or group work, e.g. what pupils need to do and who they are working with. > Teacher models their behavioural expectations for the pair or group work. > Teacher checks pupils have understood the behavioural expectations before pupils begin the pair or group work. 	<p>If your teacher is...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Not doing it at all: Model the body language you want to see from pupils during pair or group work e.g. facing the speaker and sitting up straight to show they are listening. > Doing it but needs some improvement: Model the types of verbal interaction you want to hear from pupils during the pair or group work, e.g. polite language and encouraging others to contribute. > Doing it well, but needs some stretch: Model the physical and verbal behaviours you want to see from pupils during pair or group work, giving non-examples so pupils are clear what they should not be doing too, e.g. looking out the window or interrupting.
Supporting pupils to manage their learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher ensures pupils are clear on the quality of work expected in the pair or group work and that each pupil will need to contribute to meet this goal. > Teacher supports pupils to monitor their progress to check they are on track to meet the goal of the pair or group work. > Teacher supports pupils to monitor and adjust their behaviour and that of the pair or group, so they can have effective and efficient discussions. 	

RECORD YOUR THINKING HERE

DEVELOPMENT AREA	FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA	EXAMPLE PRECISE TARGETS
(select before observing)	(select whilst observing)	(select/write whilst observing)

OBSERVE

Consider the following questions based on a short (approximately 15 minute) observation of your teacher.

What was your teacher's **previous** target? Are they meeting it? How do you know?

For the **DEVELOPMENT AREA** you are focussing on for this observation, what is your teacher already doing well?

Next, go to the previous page and select a **FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA** to further zoom in on. Then select (from the examples) or write one **PRECISE TARGET** (bite-sized action) to coach your teacher on. You can choose to stick with the previous target if your teacher have not made enough progress yet.

How will you model the target to your teacher to show them what good looks like? What questions will you ask to check your teacher understands the model? For example, 'How it is different from your current practice?', 'What impact might it have on your practice and pupils?', 'What links can you see between the model and the module principles (below)?'

Reminder: Your model should help your teacher develop their ability in some of the following:

- > Create a culture of respect and trust in the classroom that supports all pupils to succeed.
- > Teach and rigorously maintain clear behavioural expectations.
- > Consider the factors that will support effective paired or group work.
- > Practise routines for paired and group work at the beginning of the school year.
- > Reinforce routines for paired and group work.

Next, meet with your teacher to work through the 'Feedback' stage of instructional coaching. See the guidance on the feedback stage in the appendices of the Mentor Handbook for support.

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