

## Collaborative learning – using roles

**By Laura Naylor**

Collaborative learning is an effective way of encouraging and developing Talk in the classroom. Effective collaboration can support pupils to develop their understanding of a concept or topic as it provides pupils with an opportunity to hear and evaluate ideas that might be different to their own.

One example of when I used collaboration was when my class were looking at ‘Who was to blame for the death of Bess?’ in the text Highwayman in Year 6.

In order to set the ground rules for the lesson I ensured that I had gone over the talk rules and expectations for the lesson. At the time our main focus was to wait for a break in order to give our opinion so that we were not interrupting. My pupils were not used to this so this was an aspirational and challenging target. Prior to the lesson, I prepared pupils through circle time where we explored appropriate behaviours when discussing a topic such as waiting for an appropriate gap to speak and listening carefully in order to build on to a point or disagree respectfully.

The children worked in groups of 4 and each was assigned a role. The group leader directed the conversation and ensured that all children were involved. The scribe participated in the discussion and recorded notes. The group member took part in the discussion and ensured that they were challenging the views of others if they didn’t agree. The reporter shared the group’s ideas with the rest of the class. I find that groups of 4 are ideal as pupils have a shoulder partner (someone who is next to them) and a face partner (someone who is sat opposite them) so it makes it easier for them share and communicate their ideas and ensure all pupils’ voices are heard. The pupils had been using this structure for group work for about 4 weeks and were now using it well.

Prior learning of the group roles included group role cards to show the children what their expectations were in that role. I had created a video of a group of children executing the roles well from the previous year. This gave the children a good example of what this should look like. We also used the roles regularly in any talk focused scenario so that they began to build up their confidence in their role.

To ensure all pupils could meaningfully engage in the discussion, I ensured that the children had a clear understanding of the text that we were looking at. This had been a journey over 3-4 weeks in the build-up of work and unpicking of the text. I also ensured that they had a clear view of the characters throughout the text and we had built up character profiles by using ‘role on the wall’ for each character on the working wall that they could then draw upon to base their opinions around.

In order to support the children further, I then used the Tower Hamlets progression in Language Structures to create persuasive talk frames. The children then built their opinions from evidence in the text and used the talk frames to convey these. At the same time, they practised waiting for the gap and using the talk rules that were the focus for that lesson. This enabled the children to have an in-depth conversation with high quality language and structure for support.

My role throughout was to listen to the children’s ideas and prompt their thinking when necessary to scaffold or extend their learning. For instance, one group thought they had come to a collective decision

and all agreed straight away on who they believed was to blame. I then asked some questions to encourage further reflection and deeper thinking, which instigated a new line of enquiry.

Collaborative learning is something that I ensure is at the heart of every lesson within my class. I group pupils of mixed attainment into groups of four. I always remind children of our talk rules before we begin to discuss our thoughts. This ensures the children are aware of the expectations when discussing their opinions and can do this respectfully.