



Evidence Summary—Technical Annex:

There is very little impact research on collaborative talk in the early years. However, based on the evidence that does exist, the approach seems promising. Collaborative talk is well evidenced in older age groups, with approaches including dialogic teaching and exploratory talk showing a positive impact on attainment in maths, science, English and on reasoning skills (e.g. Jay et al., 2017; Mercer and Sams, 2006; Mercer et al., 2004; Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999). The few studies that examine the effect of this approach with children in the early years find a positive impact on communication and language.

One research group has examined the effect of productive classroom talk on language skills for children in the early years. They found a positive effect on participants' oral communicative competence, a finding replicated in multiple studies (van der Wilt, Bouwer, and van der Veen, 2022; van der Veen, de Mey et al., 2017; van der Veen, van der Wilt et al., 2017). Aside from this research, two other studies have explored strategies for facilitating peer-to-peer talk in early years settings. Both use problem-solving as a context for promoting collaborative talk. One intervention found that a structured dialogue to resolve peer conflicts improved communication skills, including pupils' ability to express themselves and engage in lengthy dialogues (Aram and Shlak, 2008). A different intervention used a computer programme to promote peer collaboration to achieve a shared goal; this had a positive effect on oral language outcomes (Gomez et al., 2013).

Collaborative talk interventions tend to include practices such as encouraging pupils to share their ideas and listen to each other, as well as supporting children to develop their reasoning and to build on each other's ideas (van der Veen, de Mey et al., 2017). There is currently a lack of evidence on which specific practices within this approach are particularly effective. The strategies used to facilitate collaborative talk vary significantly between the studies mentioned here. In addition, practices are often combined to make multicomponent interventions; this makes it difficult to pinpoint which practice(s) are most important for facilitating collaborative talk. However, successful interventions tend to involve training teachers or facilitators in the approach so that they can mediate the talk effectively (van der Veen, de Mey et al., 2017; Gomez et al., 2013; Aram and Shlak, 2008).

While these studies provide some initial evidence in support of collaborative talk in early years settings, none of these experiments were conducted in England. Although not an experimental study, the EPPE longitudinal study conducted analysis of case studies from effective settings in England, highlighted 'sustained shared thinking' as a common characteristic of practice in high quality early years settings. An extended episode of collaborative talk that takes place during guided play could be characterised as 'Sustained shared thinking'. Further studies are needed to test the efficacy of collaborative talk interventions with other populations, such as young children experiencing poverty in England.



References

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