

## Three kinds of talk

### (1) **Disputational talk** in which...

- There is a lot of disagreement and everyone just makes their own decisions.
- There are few attempts to pool resources, or to offer constructive criticism.
- There are often a lot of interactions of the 'Yes it is! - No it's not!' kind.
- The atmosphere is competitive rather than co-operative.

### (2) **Cumulative talk**, in which...

- Everyone simply accepts and agrees with what other people say.
- Children do use talk to share knowledge, but they do so in an uncritical way.
- Children repeat and elaborate each other's ideas, but they don't evaluate them carefully.

### (3) **Exploratory talk**, in which...

- everyone listens actively
- people ask questions
- people share relevant information
- ideas may be challenged
- reasons are given for challenges
- contributions build on what has gone before
- everyone is encouraged to contribute
- ideas and opinions treated with respect
- there is an atmosphere of trust
- there is a sense of shared purpose
- the group seeks agreement for joint decisions

## 5 Examples of talk in groups

### Sequence 1: Shane and Lester

*Two Year 5 boys are working on a puzzle (part of the Smile software) in which they have to determine at what co-ordinates on a grid map of New York an elephant is hiding.*

Lester: I can do it.

Shane: *(Still staring at the screen)* No, not up, down.

Lester: It can't be

Shane: It can

Lester: I know where it is. *(Shane takes his turn, but fails to find the elephant)*

Lester: I told you it weren't over there *(He then takes his turn, without success)*

Shane: Eh heh heh heh *(laughing gleefully)*

Lester: Which one just went on? I don't know

Shane: 1,2,3,4,5,6 *(counting squares)*

Lester: I know where it is

Shane: I got the nearest.

Lester: *(counting squares)* 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8.

Shane: I got the nearest, 5

Lester: So it has got to be 1,8

Lester: 2,8

Shane: Oh, suit yourself.

### Sequence 2: Hannah, Darryl and Deborah

*Working at the computer, three Year 5/6 children are using a Science Explorer simulation to test different materials for sound insulation.*

Hannah *(reads instructions)* 'Keep it Quiet. Which material is the best insulation? Click 'measure' to take a sound reading. Does the pitch make a difference?'

Darryl No we don't want clothes. See what one it is then. *(Points to screen)*

Hannah No it's cloth

Darryl Oh it's cloth.

Hannah Go down. This is better when Stephanie's in our group.

Darryl Metal?

Hannah Right try it.

Deborah Try what? That?

Hannah Try 'glass'

Darryl Yeah

Deborah No one.

Hannah Now!

Darryl Measure!

Hannah Now measure. Hold. *(Turns volume control dial below screen)*

Darryl Results, notes!  
Hannah Results. We need to go on a different one now. Results!  
Darryl Yeah, you need to go there so you can write everything down  
Hannah I'm not writing.

### **Sequence 3: Fritzie, Vicky and Gloria**

*As part of a series of lessons on 'Our galaxy', three girls (Year 5) are discussing the truth of a statement provided to them by their teacher.*

Fritzie: *(reads)* 'Our sun is just one of millions of stars in the galaxy called the Milky Way.' Is it true, false or unsure?

Vicky: I'm not sure actually, I haven't ...

Gloria: It's called the, yes, it's true

Vicky: Yeah, I th.. not sure but I think it may be a yes

Fritzie: why?

Vicky: Well, because, well, in the night yeah, there's loads and loads and loads of stars in the sky. But if you actually look at them really, really properly, it's actually ehm...

Fritzie: a planet?

Vicky: ... yeah, biggest star's actually the planet, and like the one that kind of twinkle, I think's the, the planet and the one that eh...

Gloria: Yeah, I saw a really big planet last night and I actually didn't see just one planet, I saw actually three really big planets, three really big stars...

Vicky: Yeah

Gloria: ...and it was amazing, it didn't even twinkle

Fritzie: So it's the only, the stars are the only one that twinkle the most, OK?

Gloria: *(nods)*

Vicky: OK, now

Fritzie: OK, that's, got that as a true

Vicky: OK, should have put true

Fritzie: Put true, true *(points at paper)*

Vicky: I couldn't, I can't even remember how to spell true anymore

#### **Sequence 4: Elenor, Georgie and Carmel**

*As part of a series of lessons on 'Our galaxy', three girls (Year 5) are discussing the truth of a statement provided to them by their teacher.*

Elenor: OK (*reads*) 'The moon changes shape because it is in the shadow of the earth'.

Carmel: No, that's not true, because there's the clouds that cover the moon

Elenor: No it isn't ... yeah

Georgie: Yeah

Elenor: Because in the day we think oh the moon's gone it hasn't gone, it's just the cloud that...

Carmel: ...have covered it

Georgie: Yeah, that's why I like, every time, well on Sunday I went out and it was like five in the morning right, and the moon was still out so that's fine cos it was still dark, right.

Elenor: Yeah

Georgie: So when we went out it was like five, four, four o'clock, something like that, like at that time there wouldn't be the moon out would there, but I saw half the moon out and I said, I said to my mums friend, I said look Tony, there's the moon already out, and he said oh yeah. Cos in the morning, when we came there was the clouds

Teacher: OK everybody, finish up the one you're talking about

Elenor: So what do we think?

Georgie: I think it's false

Carmel: False

#### **Sequence 5: Emmeline, Oliver, Ben and Maddy**

*A year 5 group have been given the pictures and descriptions of various animals of the rainforest environment they have been studying. They have to classify them as 'herbivores' or 'carnivores'.*

Emmeline: Now we've got a fish-uh- the

Oliver: What sort, the piranha

Emmeline: No, the little, not the scaly one.

Maddy: Lun, lungf ...(*hesitating*)

Oliver: Lungfish

Maddy: It probably feeds on things in the river, because it's not going to go out and catch a monkey or something, is it? (*all laugh*)

Emmeline: Yeah. Could bri ...

Oliver: *(interrupting)* There is of course river plants, some of them do feed on river plants, and leaves that fall in the river.

Maddy: Yeah, it's probably a herbivore

Ben: We haven't got anything to tell

Emmeline: What do you think it should be

Oliver: No, actually I think we should put it in 'carnivore', most fish are

Emmeline: No, because, ma ...

Oliver: *(interrupting)* It's our best and most fish are

Emmeline: *(interrupting)* Yeah, but we've got this one here, and this one here *(She indicates some fish cards in both 'carnivore' and 'herbivore' piles on the table)*

*(The discussion continues, unresolved, until Ben says ...)*

Ben: Let's have a vote, have a vote.

Emmeline: Yeah, let's have a vote.

Ben: *(to Oliver)* What do you think?

Oliver: I think 'carnivore'

Ben: *(to Maddy)* What do you reckon?

Maddy: I think 'herbivore'.

Ben: *(to Emmeline)* What do you reckon?

Emmeline: 'Herbivore'.

Oliver: *(to Ben)*

Ben: *(laughing, looking sheepish and uncertain, doesn't answer)*

Oliver: Come on, this isn't worth it, it's a lungf ...

Ben: Carnivore

Oliver: Carnivore, that's two each.

Ben: Let's, OK *(he prepares to toss a coin)*

Oliver: No, don't bother flipping a coin, it's meant to be ...

Ben: *(interrupts, tosses coin)* Flip

Oliver: ... thinking!

Ben: heads or tails?

Oliver: Lung, no, shush!

Emmeline: It's heads. Well, you win.

Oliver: *(picks up the 'lungfish' card and reads)* 'The lungfish has a pair of lungs and small gills and burrows in the mud and breathes air'. It can't be a herbivore because what would it eat when it's on its own in the sand? There's nothing to eat.