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Talk more in class, experts say

Children should be allowed to talk more in class, education experts have argued, despite the traditional view that chatter can be disruptive.

The Cambridge University study also said that a competitive atmosphere in class could be counter-productive.

It questioned the theory that encouraging pupils to compete increases their motivation to learn.

Instead, it argued, tasks should aim to encourage co-operation and group cohesion instead of competitiveness.

'Points of view'

The academics said "social interaction and collaborative activity" in class could provide "valuable opportunities" for learning.

"This challenges the traditional view that talk and social interaction among children are irrelevant, if not disruptive to learning," the report added.

"The educational value of collaborative learning has been clearly demonstrated by research from more than one line of enquiry.

"In particular, encouraging children to pursue joint goals, explain their understanding, express different points of view and attempt to reach consensus through discussion have all been found to help learning and understanding."

Teachers should be encouraging pupils to engage in "exploratory talk" that involves children "sharing, challenging and evaluating their views", it said.

'Disputational talk'

This was because "talk and social interaction" played a key role in children's social development and learning.

The researchers warned: "Disputational talk, which is highly competitive and full of disagreements, is not conducive to learning in the particular context of pupil-led work."

Research showed that working together in arts, science and mathematics should be an intrinsic part of classroom life, they said.



Pupils should also be encouraged to collaborate

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But pupils seldom had the chance to engage in co-operative discussions, the team warned.

A spokesman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families said materials guiding teachers and children in using group discussion and talking about issues to solve problems were provided to England's schools.

"In addition to this, the Primary Framework for teachers is developing the focused use of discussion to improve specific skills such as writing, problem solving, and mathematics.

"This focus on the use of collaborative talking in teaching and learning is set to continue."

The research was part of a major independent two-year study into primary education, The Primary Review.

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