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Teaching children to argue helps their development, study finds



Around 2,500 nine and 10-year-olds took part in the trial of "dialogic teaching" CREDIT: ROBERT KNESCHKE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

By **Camilla Turner**, EDUCATION EDITOR

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Teaching children to argue helps their academic development, a study has found.

Research by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), a charity set up by the Sutton Trust, found that encouraging pupils to reason with their classmates can boost results in English, maths and science.

Children at 78 primary schools with higher-than-average numbers of poorer children were given lessons in which they were encouraged to debate, discuss and argue with others about their answers.

Around 2,500 nine and 10-year-olds took part in the trial of "dialogic teaching", in which teachers asked open questions and encouraging youngsters to do more than simply state an answer.

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Youngsters who took part made on average two months more progress in English and science CREDIT: BARRY BATCHELOR

An independent evaluation of the initiative found that the youngsters who took part made on average two months more progress in English and science than a similar group of pupils who did not take part - the control group.

Children in both groups were tested in each of the subjects before and after the programme. The findings indicate that this type of teaching may improve youngsters' overall thinking and learning skills, rather than just their subject knowledge, EEF said.

Teachers were in favour of the scheme, but many felt that they needed more than two terms to make it fully part of their classroom teaching.

Sir Kevan Collins, chief executive of the EEF, said: "Getting children to think and talk about their own learning more explicitly can be one of the most effective ways to improve academic outcomes.

"But it can be difficult to put this into practice in the classroom. While there is no simple strategy or trick, today's evaluation report on dialogic teaching does give primary school heads and teachers practical evidence on an approach that appears to be effective across different subjects."

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