

Talk Moves That Earn Their Time

Classroom talk pays off when teachers make specific moves, repeatedly. These four carry the strongest evidence.

Invite ideas, genuinely

Ask for thinking before evaluating it. The strongest single talk move in the meta-analytic evidence.

In class: What are we noticing here? Give me three different ideas before we judge any of them.

Take up what they said

Build your next question from the learner's answer, not your script. Uptake tells the room their thinking steers the lesson.

In class: Jay says the ice melted because of the salt. If Jay is right, what should happen in THIS beaker?

Extend the wait

Three to five seconds after asking, and again after the answer. Depth needs silence to form.

In class: Count five in your head. The second answer is usually better than the first.

Press for reasoning

Answers are the start. The learning is in the because.

In class: What makes you say that? Who can add evidence to Maya's idea, or challenge it kindly?

Dialogic Move Cards

Four moves for steering discussion without taking it over. One move per exchange beats five at once.

Revoice

Restate a learner's idea in cleaner terms, then check you kept their meaning.

Say: "So your claim is that heavier objects fall faster. Is that what you meant?"

Cross the room

Send one learner's idea to another learner, not back to yourself.

Say: "Priya, do you agree with Sam's reasoning? Why or why not?"

Press

Ask for the evidence behind a claim, warmly and routinely, so it stops feeling like a trap.

Say: "What in the text makes you think that?"

Park and return

Hold a rich tangent visibly, finish the thread, then come back to it.

Say: "That is a big question. I am writing it here and we return to it in ten minutes."

Our Ground Rules for Talk

Exploratory talk needs agreed rules, taught and practised like any routine. Display and rehearse before discussion-heavy lessons.

Everyone's ideas are heard

We invite quieter voices in, and we let people finish.

In class: Hana has not spoken yet. Hana, what is your group thinking?

We give reasons

Claims travel with a because. Opinions are welcome; evidence makes them useful.

In class: I think the king was wrong BECAUSE the source says...

We challenge ideas, not people

Disagreeing well is the skill. We say what we see differently and ask what others think.

In class: I see it differently, because... what does everyone else think?

We can change our minds

Changing your mind in the light of a better argument is winning, not losing.

In class: I used to think... but now I think... because...

Planning a Discussion That Works

Discussion fails in the planning, not the moment. Check before any talk-heavy lesson.

Before

- The question is genuinely discussable: a closed question makes a dead discussion.
- Learners have something to reason FROM: a text, data, an experience, not thin air.
- Ground rules have been rehearsed this term, not just displayed.
- Sentence stems are visible for learners who need a way in.

During

- I am tracking who has spoken, and inviting the quiet middle.
- My moves are mostly invite, uptake, press: not mini-lectures between answers.
- Wait time survives the awkward silence.
- One rich idea gets followed deeply rather than six skimmed.

After

- The thinking gets banked: a two-sentence written conclusion or exit note.
- I note which learners need a planned way in next time.

Classroom Talk: A 5-Minute Evidence Briefing

What the research says, including the critique every oracy lead should be able to answer.

■ The trial evidence is real

A large randomised trial of dialogic teaching put intervention classes two months ahead across English, maths and science in 20 weeks, with teacher development at its core, not a quick technique.

■ Specific moves, not talk in general

Meta-analysis finds dialogic talk correlates with achievement while monologic talk does not, and inviting learners to share ideas is the strongest single move. It is the structure of talk that matters.

■ Engage the critique seriously

Cushing argues the oracy agenda rests on deficit views of working-class and racialised children's language and overclaims talk as a route to social justice. Teach talk as good pedagogy for all; do not frame children's home language as the problem.

■ The honest caveat

Talk-move correlations are mostly observational, and trial effects come bundled with sustained professional development. Expect gains from changed teacher habits over terms, not from a one-off speaking lesson.

Evidence base

Alexander, R. (2018). Developing dialogic teaching: genesis, process, trial. *Research Papers in Education*.

Tao, Y., Wang, M. and Zhu, S. (2024). The relationship between teacher talk and students' academic achievement: a meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review*.

Cushing, I. (2025). Social in/justice and the deficit foundations of oracy. *Oxford Review of Education*.

van der Veen, C. et al. (2021). Design, implementation, and evaluation of dialogic classroom talk in early childhood education. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*.