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talk2learn highlights

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

Issue 4b

In case you missed it...

Recent highlights from NCSL in Dialogue, talk2learn's online community for national education debate

Also available as a podcast

No hands-up!

Giving pupils the opportunity to 'phone a friend' or choose a '50-50' option, make use of whiteboards or take some quality thinking time before answering questions are some of the ways teachers encourage participation when they introduce a 'no hands-up' policy into the classroom.

In a recent talk2learn debate, school leaders discussed these and other tactics aimed at eliminating pupils' embarrassment over incorrect responses, building confidence and ensuring everyone is engaged.

Some have found the 'hands-up' habit hard to break, particularly with older children and more experienced staff for whom the practice had become ingrained.

One contributor described her use of a hybrid 'hands-up' and 'no-hands' method, whereby pupils are encouraged to have thinking time and then place their hands on their heads or ears if they want to contribute. They could also record their answers on small whiteboards. She added –

"A drama technique to support those less willing to voice their ideas is for the pupil to pick a friend to stand/sit behind them to whom they whisper their idea. That friend then shares this to the whole class."

Mark Creasy, a deputy head from Hertfordshire, said that the classroom needed to be a safe place to learn where students could express their fears and concerns, but teachers often prevented this by not allowing free expression. "There's no specific policy at my school but I think a range of practices is needed. How the interaction is structured is the key for me and allowing mistakes is how we learn."



Primary teacher Andrea Trigg, who admitted that she didn't like speaking in front of others as a pupil, described how her use of 'phone a friend' and '50-50' options reduced pressure on children – "It provides a little bit of focus especially if children are asked to explain their reasons for choosing one option rather than the other," she said.

Debra Clapham from Scarborough used a technique she had read about with her Year 9 SEN class in which children raised their right hand if they knew the answer and their left if they didn't. Those who didn't know were encouraged to have another go through re-phrased questioning.

"But I can share the views of those who advocate a no-hands policy," she said. "Bravo to those who dare to take risks."

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities