



*Investments in children are increasingly seen as one of best and most valuable long-term investments we can make.*

[https://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/index\\_53294.html](https://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/index_53294.html)

## Valuing student voice

The following resources will help students find, develop and use their voices in the learning process, and each will help us to demonstrate our commitment to – our investment in - our students.

I have grouped these loosely under the headings

- Classroom communication,
- The classroom and
- Strategies for teaching in English.

### Classroom communication

**Establish your class expectations** about listening to, and respecting talk, from the start.

Accept student contributions to any classroom conventions you intend to implement. Review



these at least twice a term to make sure they remain current. Students need to know their contribution to the classroom ethos and culture is valued as the year goes on.

**Displays:** Anything on display must have significance for the students. Always have a class list accessible for students to be able to learn each others' names. Have a 'base' of several items of immediate use and relevance to the work being studied, and invite the students to plan further displays. Support and guide, and ask for collaboration and justification. If you have charts up for reference, make sure they are accessible. Students need to be able to find what they need. Space invites student input.

**Note:** Any item on display for more than two weeks becomes part of the 'wallpaper' and loses its effectiveness. Don't spend dollars on charts and coloured papers and decorative elements just to make the classroom look busy; it can look like a supermarket rather than a classroom.

## The classroom

**Get to know your students:** Learn their names quickly. Use name cards at the beginning. With students with the same name, work out a way of discriminating between them early. Try not to use 'Joshua L.' and 'Joshua G'. – each needs to know they matter, so use the full name. Provide opportunities to find out about their lives. Listen, eavesdrop, watch them in the playground, talk with each student.

**Provide opportunities** for students to request working partners. At the beginning of each term, ask students to list 2 or 3 other people they would like to work with. You can use this information to set up groups immediately. More importantly, you can learn heaps about the social structures that are already in place. Construct a sociogram from the information to show you who is the most popular student, who may be isolated, where the social networks are. I like to add to my diagram whether the student has been chosen as a 1, 2 or 3 choice; lots of 1s and 2s give you the most popular students. The students not chosen by anyone need extra support. Each term you can map the changes in dynamics across the classroom. The process is explained and there are some good ideas are at: <https://www.6seconds.org/2012/05/08/sociograms-mapping-the-emotional-dynamics-of-a-classroom/>



**Use a strategy such as an 'Affinity Diagram'** to get students to express their views about classroom issues, such as major projects, areas of study, or decorating the classroom. Teach your students to use an Affinity Diagram as an effective tool in many contexts. Affinity Diagrams can help you go from complete chaos and no overview of your information, to creating groups of information, which you have named and organised into hierarchies that make sense. See <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/affinity-diagrams-learn-how-to-cluster-and-bundle-ideas-and-facts>

**Seating:** Plan your seating so it is inclusive. Make sure every child can see the whiteboard or whatever focal point you have for your classroom. Sit in each of the seats if necessary and check what it is the student will have access to. If you are going to do board work everyone must be able to access the information. Check the glare from windows, shadows from walls or overhanging displays, space to move around the desks, access to materials. Use quality whiteboard markers. Write clearly and neatly on whiteboards and displays – care with presentation demonstrates respect for the reader; this works both ways – from students back to you too.

**Use the school's behaviour management system**, for consistency. A word of warning – some systems require you to put the names of students with inappropriate behaviour on the board, then add crosses for further misdemeanors. This demonstrates the inadequacies of these difficult students and reinforces these for the whole class to see. This process can quickly become a competition to see who can be the worst – students will push that envelope as far as they can. Keep that negative data separate from the daily classroom culture. Recognise positive behaviours on the board - more ticks mean more minutes of privilege (early lunch, games time, house points etc). This turns into a competition too. Ask your students why it works.

**Work to develop a *growth mindset*** in your students. Carol Dweck's work is well-established and very accessible. If you want to apply her principles, do it properly - read up on the theory, develop a couple of strategies that you know you can use, and do it whole-heartedly. Give yourself a term to trial the principles; use before and after measures for the behaviours you want to encourage. Then you have the evidence for changes. Dweck is on You Tube as well as at this useful site: <https://mindsetonline.com/>

**Other:** Some great suggestions regarding classroom culture are described at <https://thehighlyeffectiveteacher.com/the-number-1-behaviour-management-tool>, under the title *The Number 1 Behaviour Management Tool: Create a Predictable Environment*.

## Strategies for teaching in English

Demonstrate that you value student talk by providing opportunities for focused, elaborated talk. There are excellent strategies that help students to develop their ideas and ways to share them.

### ‘Dialogic teaching’

Some of the most recent information regarding the importance of classroom communication as a resource for learning is in *Talking the Talk: Snapshots from Australian Classrooms* PETAA 2018, edited by Pauline Jones and others. Part 1 provides insights and background for what is referred to a ‘dialogic teaching’, that is, ‘*to promote rich and varied uses of language for learning in classrooms*’ (Christie, 2018, p.2). Parts 2 and 3 give the justification for dialogic teaching, features of the classroom to support dialogic teaching types, and examples in the classroom. You will find plenty to work on. The strong theoretical basis for dialogic teaching will be of assistance if you want to develop a research project at a later date.

### ‘Community of Inquiry’

Philosophical inquiry can be a powerful tool for students to develop and communicate their thinking. Challenging topics are often introduced in artificial contexts in the classroom, and discussion can be forced and unproductive. This process of building a community of inquiry requires students to think through questions to arrive at an understanding of agreement. The process consists of introducing and reading carefully chosen text, then questions are generated by students about the text. Consensus of meaning is arrived through thinking and discussion. Anthony Brown’s *Zoo* is an interesting text to use because of the ambiguity of illustrations and the actions of the characters. Examining the text using this process can allow students to consider issues such as the differing wants, needs and motives of family members, as well as the morality of keeping animals in captivity.

The P4C Co-operative: Philosophy for children/philosophy in the classroom website has excellent resources for starting out and developing your students' thinking, speaking and listening. <https://p4c.com>

Your school library may have a copy of Philip Cam's *Thinking Together: Philosophical Inquiry for the Classroom* (1995)

### **'Conversations About Text – strategies in action'**

Joanne Rossbridge and Kathy Rushton have produced two excellent books to help teach grammar through effective and focused work with both literary and non-fiction texts. Complex grammar is made accessible for the teacher and students through detailed analysis of texts, activities and discussion. Well worth planning for teaching about the clause, adverbials, cohesion, etc in literary texts, and the structures and features of factual texts.

### **Book talk**

- Templates and scaffolds to guide book talk can be found in the excellent *A Literature Companion*, by Lorraine McDonald, 2nd Edition, published in 2018.
- Aidan Chambers' classic *Tell me (Children, reading and talk)* (PETA/Thimble Press, 1993). Get hold of this gem to read over the Christmas holidays, when you have time to absorb the ideas. Try them out with your own children, and/or any who happen to be visiting.
- Literature study is now a common feature of many classrooms where depth of understanding is valued as part of learning about literary texts. Literature circles provide an excellent way to examine text. There are numerous resources to support these <http://www.litcircles.org/Overview/overview.html>. In some schools this examination is led by the teacher-librarian, whose administrative duties are done by a technician. Build it into your weekly timetable.
- Detailed instructions for literature study can be found in *Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6* (Fountas & Pinnell).
- 'New Focus on Reading 3-6 – Australian Curriculum' (NSW DoE 2016) materials also contain information about book talk.
- Use the NSW English Syllabus K-10, for speaking and listening outcomes <https://syllabus.nesa.nsw.edu.au/english>



- The Australian Curriculum has level and content descriptions for achievement standards. Examples of student spoken text are included. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>

## References

Cam, P. (1995) *Thinking Together: Philosophical Inquiry for the Classroom* Marrickville: Southwood Press

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Edwards-Groves, C. (2014) *Talk moves: A repertoire of practices for productive classroom dialogue* PETAA Paper 195, Newtown: PETAA [http://www.petaa.edu.au/imis\\_prod/w/Teaching\\_Resources/PPs/PETAA\\_PAPER\\_195.aspx](http://www.petaa.edu.au/imis_prod/w/Teaching_Resources/PPs/PETAA_PAPER_195.aspx)

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McDonald, L. (2018) *A Literature Companion* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Newtown: PETAA

Rossbridge, J & Rushton, K. (2010) *Conversations About Text: Teaching Grammar using literary texts* Marrickville: PETA (e:lit)

Rossbridge, J & Rushton, K. (2011) *Conversations About Text: Teaching Grammar using factual texts* Marrickville: PETAA

## Websites

<https://thehighlyeffectiveteacher.com/the-number-1-behaviour-management-tool> accessed 9/10/2018

PETAA: [http://www.petaa.edu.au/imis\\_prod/w/Home/w/Default.aspx?hkey=35af074a-3359-4752-9d86-1512f19a2b83](http://www.petaa.edu.au/imis_prod/w/Home/w/Default.aspx?hkey=35af074a-3359-4752-9d86-1512f19a2b83)