

## **Discussing: a time for getting to know, for respecting and for fully valuing children in difficulty**

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Classroom discussions are not only an opportunity for sharing ideas, but can become a moment for cognitive enrichment, when the participants succeed in producing a “collective line of reasoning”, where the individual’s way of thinking is supplanted by socially shared knowledge. Here some problems relating to the inclusion of disadvantaged children in the discussion group are tackled with a group of teachers; moreover, in order to put forward an initial response, some of the research that these teachers have carried out are critically reviewed.

It has been deduced that, in group discussions, less able children are helped directly by their more able peers, who act as models for them. On the other hand, the more able children compare their ideas with those currently held by their classmates, ideas they have already realized as being wrong or limited, and they can now become “aware” of their own knowledge. If a number of children work together and have to share the solution with their classmates, it takes them more time and leads them along a more tortuous road, but in the end they achieve higher levels of performance. Discussions can also offer children in difficulty the time and space for reflecting on their ideas, for expressing themselves freely, for comparing their lines of reasoning with others. At times, their observations may cause cognitive conflicts among their classmates, but the proposals and reflections of the group can actively absorb these conflicts in the spiral of the discussion.

The experiments carried out have demonstrated how portraying solidarity can foster an improvement in the performance of the children in difficulty, however they have not resolved one important educational issue, which is currently the topic of new reflection and research: how to intervene in order to “encourage” children to portray solidarity towards the weaker members in a small group.

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