

Thrive 365

Dragonfly: Impact Education



Did you know?

How we converse with others is key to our wellbeing as humans. Philosopher Paul Grice suggested that there are rules to follow in order to have a successful and socially acceptable conversation. This is not something we think about a lot, until maybe we are faced with having a 'conversation' with a 2-year old who has something urgent to get across with limited vocabulary. Or, a 'chat' with an 8-year old who wants to tell you every detail of a game about hundreds of types of dragon (an insight into my week!). So how do we learn the art of conversation?

1 Quantity & Quality

Grice's first two rules of conversation are around quantity and quality. You should provide enough factual information to get your meaning across but not too much that you lose the interest of the listener. Children can practise this with a partner in role plays. For example, the teacher gives one partner a detailed story to tell the other person. They are only allowed to speak for 10 seconds at a time before stopping and allowing the partner to make notes and ask another clarification question. The aim is for the partner to learn as many of the details of the story as possible.

2 Relevance

The relevance of what we are saying is crucial. Not only because it will become boring for the listener if you are talking about something that isn't relevant to them, but also because they will begin to search for an explanation as to why you have broken this rule of conversation. First they may search for a reason why what you are saying IS relevant but after that may look for other explanations. They may, for instance, assume you are trying to avoid the real topic that needs to be discussed or that you haven't been listening to what they said.

3 Manner

Grice's final rule relates to our choice of words and the structure of conversations. In other words, presenting the content of our conversation in an orderly way that the listener will understand. For instance, if telling a story, report it in chronological order so that the listener can follow. Also, avoid using overly complex words or jargon if the listener will not understand. Helping children and young people practise the art of effective conversation in safe spaces such as role play, will help them to feel confident in a range of social situations which can build self-esteem.

