Impact report 2021 - 2022

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Contents

A year of innovation for deep impact at scale The headlines Who, what and why What we did this year Our reach Our impact What's next? Data, references and thanks



A year of innovation for deep impact at scale



This was a year of innovation and exciting transformation for us. Last year, we radically increased our reach and saw the potential we have to scale up in the years to come. We took this as a challenge to be bold and creative this year in developing our programme, to enable us to have a meaningful impact that can continue to grow.

The growth we achieved in 2020-21 came from making our teaching resources freely available to any teacher globally. Our next challenge was better-understanding which of those teachers work with students who have the greatest need, and supporting as many of them as possible to use the resources for regular classroom discussions. Teachers can use our resources however they like. That could be for a lively one-off discussion to bring a curriculum topic to life or to help students explore an issue that's on their minds. But our goal in 2021-22 was not only to enable still more teachers to find our resources and use them in the ways that suit them, but to prioritise supporting those teachers of disadvantaged children who were keen to have weekly conversations.

Children who regularly join our topical discussions can significantly progress

in creativity, problem-solving, listening effectively and speaking with confidence. This is profoundly important. Those skills are correlated with improved life outcomes from higher wages to better wellbeing and overcoming adversity, but disadvantaged children have fewer opportunities to build them.* As our previous impact reports have shown, children also learn to apply these skills to the news, to deeply understand issues affecting their lives and futures.

In today's schools, finding the space for regular, in-depth discussions about the news is extremely difficult; having access to good resources is not enough. So we've always gone further than providing resources, offering training and support to passionate teachers who are committed to overcoming the barriers. We help them make these discussions a regular feature in classrooms where they can make the most difference. Having grown so much last year, coming into 2021-22 we set about finding ways to offer this support at scale.

*<u>https://www.skillsbuilder.org/blog/the-essential-</u> <u>skills-tracker-2022</u>



Emily Evans, Founder and Chief Executive, The Economist Educational Foundation

In this report, we're excited to share the results of how we stepped up to that challenge. Our programme evolved to allow us to continue reaching more children while still deepening our impact:

1. To keep *growing*, we made it even easier for teachers to find and use our resources by creating a library that allows them to search our whole archive and filter by topic or curriculum subject.

https://talk.economistfoundation.org/resources/

2. To keep *deepening* our impact, we began asking teachers to create a free account to access resources. This allows us to build a global community of teachers that we can nurture, support and learn from, in particular teachers of disadvantaged students who want to make topical discussions a regular part of school life.

As we share in the following pages, we're already seeing the impact gains from taking this big next step, which was made possible by the generosity, commitment and creativity of our growing community of partners. In a year when schools globally still faced enormous pandemic-related challenges, this growth in impact felt particularly important. It was so exciting for us to be able to work with many more of the inspiring teachers who use our programme to help prepare their students for the world, often in incredibly difficult circumstances, and to start building relationships with them in new communities outside the UK.



3. We renamed the programme for greater global understanding, so the Burnet News Club in this new scalable form became Topical Talk. Our programme was created in memory of Alastair Burnet, the former editor of *The Economist*, so Topical Talk's most prestigious prize is the Alastair Burnet Award for outstanding contributions to discussions about the news.

The headlines



5000

teachers globally set up Topical Talk accounts

of them work with a high number of socioeconomicallydisadvantaged children

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SHARE YOUR

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JOB2 AN

80

We created over 80 hours of teaching resources and made them freely available

100

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL:

WHA

These resources were used in over 100 countries around the world and we launched our first partnership with a school district in the US

> Topical Talk teachers reach over

125k children







RUSSIA THE NEXT MOVE

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1111

These teaching resolution are supported by:

KPMG

Mart

Ferdinand Marcos.

more teachers than last year are using Topical Talk regularly in their classrooms



When children take part regularly, they can make



more progress than their peers in critical thinking and communication skills

Who, what and why





Who we are and what we do



We are an independent charity that combines deep education know-how with The Economist's journalistic expertise.



We empower disadvantaged school children with the knowledge and skills they need for these times of complex social and environmental challenges, misinformation and polarisation. We enable them to join inspiring discussions about the news which teach them to think critically, communicate effectively and understand the world.



We give teachers training and resources to have these discussions in their classrooms, and children use our website to join international discussions online with each other and leading topic experts.

Why we do it

Learning to think and speak well can change lives... but disadvantaged children have the fewest opportunities to build these skills

Essential skills including creativity, problem-solving, speaking and listening are linked to improved life outcomes from higher wages to better wellbeing. They're widely perceived to be crucial for overcoming adversity. Yet disadvantaged children are least likely to have opportunities to build these skills at school.[1]

Young people need these skills to engage with real-world issues affecting their lives, societies and planet

We have to empower the next generation to think more deeply and talk more constructively so they can tackle huge social and environmental challenges not of their making.

Strong critical-thinking and communication are vital in an age of misinformation and polarisation

Fewer than 4% of children in the UK or US have the skills to tell whether a news story is real or fake, and disadvantaged children are even less likely to be able to do this.[2] The skills we help children to build are essential for questioning information, making sense of complexity and forming sound views through open-minded discussion and debate.



Brandlehow Primary School, United Kingdom

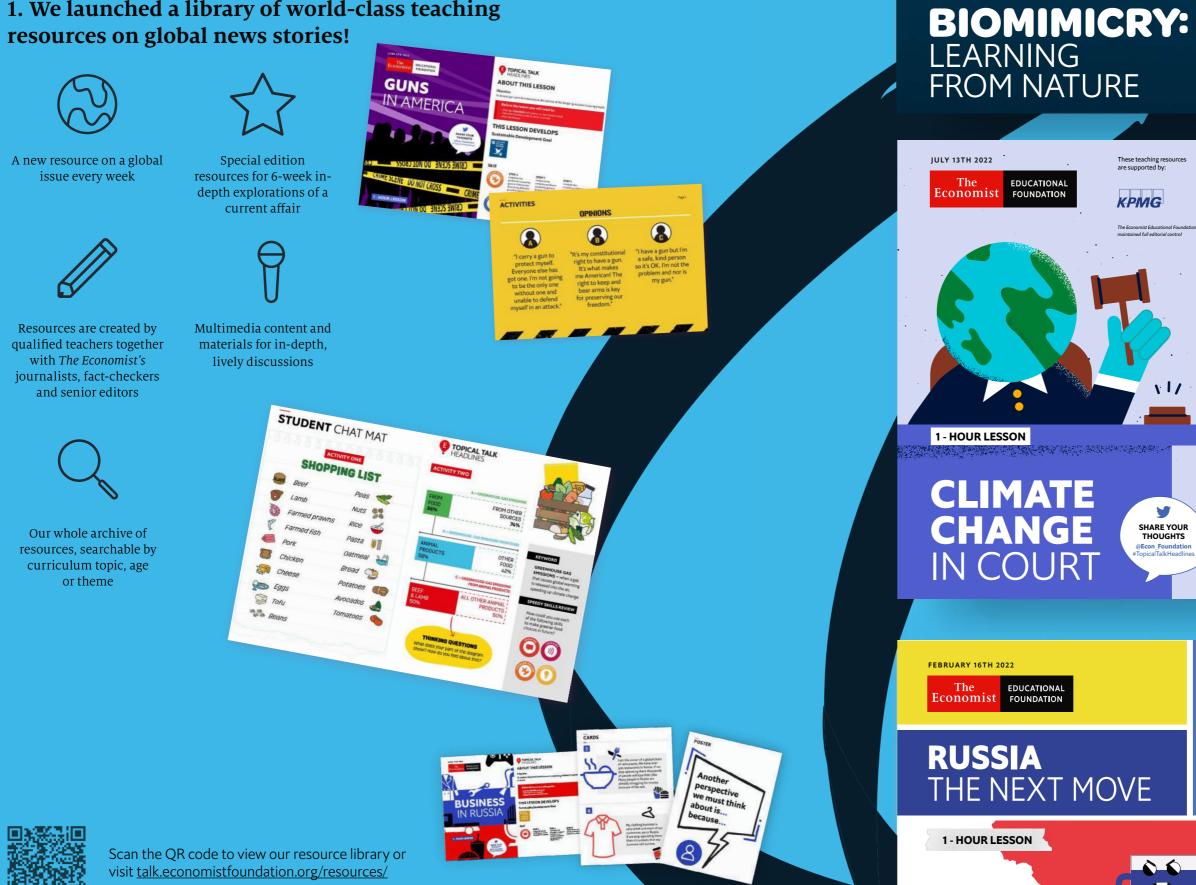


What we did this year

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1. We launched a library of world-class teaching resources on global news stories!





EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

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The Economist

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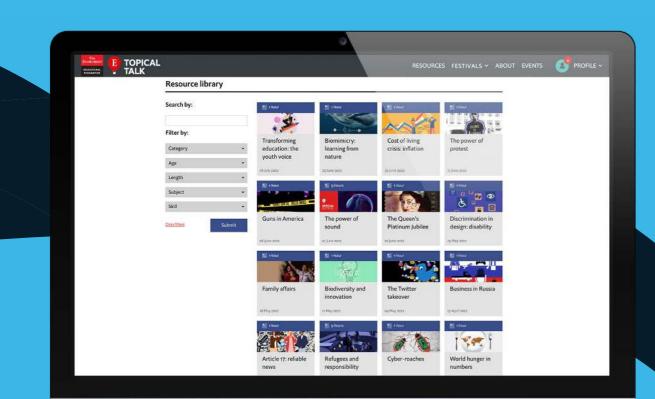
15TH OCTOBER 2021 The

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2. We facilitated unique global converstions

Children joined international discussions with each other and inspiring topic experts on our online Student Hub.



"The work of our students [on the Student Hub] is highly regarded by our school leaders and is shared and celebrated throughout the school, including the school governors."

Teacher, Graveney School, UK

"I have a feeling of belonging from Topical Talk; the news is like a connection to the rest of the whole world and on the Hub you can share ideas without the fear of rejection."

Student, Weston Favell Academy, UK

Students shared their opinions on a range of topics



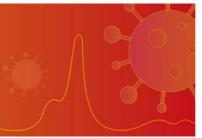
On the Pandora papers



On discrimination in design

One way that democratic societies can hold I think it should be law that companies have racially diverse design teams. This is these people accountable is by eliminating because if design teams are made up of corrupt politicians in the next election. almost all white people, the designers might I know this is not as easy as it seems for not think about problems that people with many countries in the world. But if society is darker skin might experience with a new aware of how it needs to improve and coopproduct. For example, the problem that erates against corruption, it is possible. some sensors do not detect darker skin tones could have been avoided.

> excellent_solution | Cheam Fields Primary Academy | United Kingdom



fabulous_radio | Rajshahi Cadet College

|Bangladesh

Whether the public should vote on big decisions about covid-19 restrictions

I definitely do not think that decisions about covid-19 rules should go to a public vote. It's a complex situation but I believe it is in the public's best interest for the government to decide what happens next. Members of the public might use their vote to prioritise themselves over others and might not have the right information - whereas governments are more likely to have up-to-date information, data and solutions. Better informed decisions are safer decisions.

fiery_reality | Graveney School | United Kingdom



On the Kyle Rittenhouse trial

I think that justice has not been achieved in this case because three people were shot but Mr Rittenhouse is free. Even though the protest may have become violent, there were other ways that Mr Rittenhouse could have dealt with the situation without a gun. I do not agree with the second amendment - no one should be able to carry a gun for self-defence.

inspiring_outcome | Graveney School | United Kingdom



"It's great to see individuals who normally stay quiet put forward their opinions, especially in the smaller group work. The [teaching resources] are a great way of generating class discussion."

Teacher, Cirencester Kingshill School, UK

"The Topical Talk resources and lessons are split into different segments which make it easy for the teacher to follow. In addition, each section can be amended to cater for the pupils we teach. The students love the various methodologies used. For example, sometimes there is a video with directed questions, there may be a group work activity, pair work.... Each lesson offers something practical for the students to critically engage with and utilise their skills."

Teacher, Presentation Secondary School Warrenmount, Ireland

"For me, it is very easy to use, and I can see the students engaging and thinking about the material. The resources are also multi-disciplinary, which creates opportunities for me to drive home the message that subjects interconnect. For my students, the sessions are active: they involve thinking, talking, questioning, reflecting. The resources are topical and up-to-date and students relish the opportunity to discuss current news/affairs."

Teacher, King Alfred's Academy, UK





They had chance to engage with inspiring volunteers from our corporate partners

" I use [critical thinking] skills regularly in my role as a transactional lawyer, whether to analyse information, consider implications or construct arguments to justify a client's position. It's good to be able to share my abilities with the younger generation. I could see the students build in confidence over a topic cycle and start to respond with comments and questions for each other. In an age of misinformation, I feel as if I'm doing a small part to broaden their understanding and to give them the skills to challenge what they hear."

Clifford Chance LLP volunteer

"[The students] set an example to us all with their ability to tackle very complex topics, and their willingness to have their beliefs and assumptions constructively challenged."

Arup volunteer

Huge thanks to volunteers from



Examples of volunteer interactions with students



Comments

School, Palestine

became so big?

It is true that big companies are big competition for smaller businesses but I think this is fair because even the biggest corporations were small companies in the past. They developed over time with a lot of hard work. Therefore, in my opinion, small companies should work on themselves and work on their products so that one day they can compete on the same level as the biggest ones.

majestic_moon | Beit Hanoun Prep Girls

You are right that many big companies

an example of how a big company

Volunteer | Natalie @ Arup

start off small and grow over time with a lot of hard work. Can anyone find

The founder started his journey with just a room behind a motel. He converted it into a small restaurant where he sold fast food to passersby. This restaurant gained great popularity in his city and so he went on to open more. Now KFC is one of the largest restaurant chains in the world!

I think the example of KFC is a good one.

Comfortable_contribution | Beit Hanoun Prep Girls School, Palestine



They had their questions answered by inspiring topic experts such as Malala Yousafzai

"How do you deal with the news and is there something you tell Is there something you tell yourself or other people when you're upset or angry to help them move on or feel better?"

Student | Ravensthorpe Primary School | United Kingdom

Malala: I don't get angry. I can get frustrated sometimes because I feel like not enough is being done and it is taking too long and I still don't have an answer to that... We are surrounded by information on TVs, on our digital devices, on our mobile screens. I think the challenge for the future is how do we process, analyse and evaluate that information? There's not a shortage of information. We have the issue of fake news misinformation. So quality education is urgent. It is important. It is important for peace and stability. It is important for democracy. It is important for making informed decisions, and it is important for our own empowerment and in self-care as well. So I would just push for education even more when I get frustrated.

"What advice would you give to your younger self and why?"

Student | Dr. Nazih El Bizri High School | Lebanon

Malala: I don't give advice to my younger self because she's always better. Because when we are young, when we are still children, we have the courage. We are brave. We believe in any change. We believe in ourselves. And I think that it's with time, It's what we hear from others, what we see, what we face on social media, what we face in our environment, that we lose hope, that we get discouraged. So I always look back to my younger self and I ask her for advice, and she tells me to believe in myself and keep going. It was a 13 year old, 12 year old Malala who believed that we can educate all girls all around the world. So I take that message with me from home and keep going.



Looking ahead

Having more teachers engaged with our programme is already helping us learn more from them. As more teachers globally used our Hub, we saw that most of them particularly like using it for a finite burst rather than all year round. Running it as a project for a couple of months allowed them to put more time into making the most of it, and made it feel novel and exciting to the students.

This showed us an exciting opportunity to increase the impact of the site by embracing its potential as a platform for a global school event. We did deeper userresearch to explore this and designed the next phase of our online Hub, Topical Talk Festival.

The seven-week festival was designed to significantly increase teacher and student engagement in the 2022 – 23 school year and beyond, through the excitement of a global event and additional elements like live global lessons and awards for students who make the best contributions.



3. We enhanced our programme for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

We secured our first government grant, from The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), to work with teachers, children and other experts to develop Topical Talk for these students.

We learned the programme can work particularly well in SEND-specialist schools, showing us a really exciting opportunity to grow our impact by engaging and supporting more teachers in these settings.

We made wide-ranging new developments to Topical Talk to improve accessibility further, and we designed specialist training on engaging SEND students in inclusive, accessible classroom discussions about the news.

Example developments for SEND students

• Activity design – e.g. more multisensory activities!

• Site functionality - e.g. giving students easier ways to join discussions such as buttons to show they agree / disagree with sentence starters to explain why

"Students are tackling things they would have been frightened to tackle - the concepts and the understanding they have now has been beyond anything I have seen them be able to get to with other resources."

Teacher, Laleham Gap, UK

Looking ahead

We're going to grow our work with SEND-specialist teachers, offering further training and setting out to build long-term school partnerships.

4. We took our first step to launch Topical Talk across the pond

Topical Talk now reaches countries all over the world, so we're expanding our in-person training and support for teachers beyond the UK, starting with America!

We're running our first US pilot with the inspirational teachers and leaders at Clayton County Public School district (CCPS), near Atlanta in Georgia. Our partnership with CCPS kicked off with

teacher training on facilitating high-quality topical discussions in class.

It's a privilege to begin more intensive work in a new education system. We hope our collaboration with CCPS will empower more children with the skills to think deeply and communicate openly in a divided society.

5. We inspired and supported our much-larger community of teachers to drive deeper impact

By launching Topical Talk, we radically expanded the number of teachers signed up to our programme and the number of those able to receive support and inspiration to use our resources more regularly.

To keep teachers engaged, and inspire and support them to engage more intensively, we

- Shared our weekly Topical Talk Teachers newsletter with a new, world-class resource on a global news story each week plus tips and inspiration for having great discussions
- Trained hundreds of teachers in online workshops to develop techniques for student-centred discussion

"The pace of the training was brilliant opportunities to break, think and research. Superb, engaging slides. Really interactive and relevant breakouts opportunities to share/ compare approaches of how to utilise the resources in line with oracy"

Teacher, Plymouth, UK

- teachers to support them to engage with Topical Talk
- Visited classes and delivered Topical Talk sessions
- Created a group of Impact Champion teachers to discuss the impact of Topical Talk on their students across an academic year
- Ran projects with teachers in specific supported to use our Power of Sound special edition resources and students shared their opinions with each other.

"The [Rochdale project] has been fantastic and enlightening not only for students but also for me. The team has been a beacon of support and we have been scaffolded throughout."

Rochdale Teacher

The Economist Educational Foundation Impact report 2021 - 2022

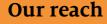
• Held webinars for our global community of

communities such as Rochdale. Teachers were

Our reach







We grew from a few hundred Burnet News Club teachers in the UK to over 5,000 Topical Talk teachers in more than 100 countries, reaching a potential 125,000 children.

5000+ 125k

Topical talk teachers

children reached

250+ x4

enagaged teachers

Crucially, we increased the number of teachers using our resources for regular hour-long discussions from a little over 60 in the previous year (our most-engaged Burnet News Club teachers) to over 250.

more children That's over 4X more, and it means

thousands more children benefiting from the potentially transformative impact of this.



Hornsey School For Girls

of Topical Talk teachers globally told us they work with a high number of children from socioeconomicallydisadvantaged homes.



Through targeted outreach and programme design, we aim to continue growing this percentage.



Our teaching resources are free.



Topical Talk online discussions are exclusively for state-funded schools or low-fee schools serving socioeconomically-disadvantaged communities.

2*1*/

And our teacher training is exclusively for teachers working with a high number of disadvantaged students.









Capital City Academy



Birchwood Primary School

Our impact



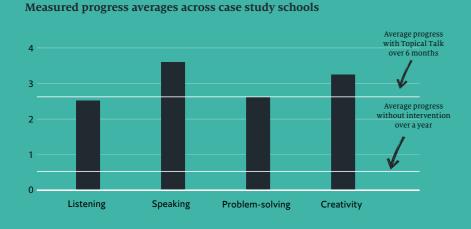
Children built essential skills

Consistent with our previous impact reports, they start participating in Topical Talk and this year we found again that children who take part in Topical Talk discussions regularly can make 5X more progress in critical thinking and communication skills.

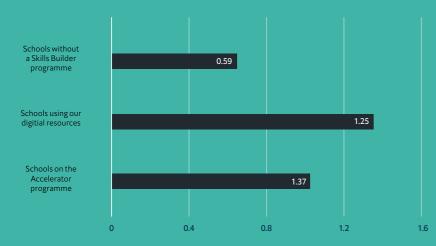
We measure students' progress using the Skills Builder framework. We ask teachers to steps on average across the four skills we complete an assessment of their class before measure.*

then again a few months later.

Without any intervention, children make 0.59 average steps of progress in a year in essential skills.[3] In schools that run Topical Talk regularly, children can make 2.95



Average steps of progress in the year



We're proud to be a Level Four Skills Builder partner, which recognises that we're doing the right things to help children to make progress.[4] Skills Builder Partnership is a global movement of employers, educators, and impact organisations working around essential skills.

The Skills Builder Universal Framework is a widely recognised tool for tracking skills progress.

> *For this year, the data on student skills progress came from six 'impact champion' schools who ran the programme regularly. The schools were from the UK, Palestine and Tunisia, and the data are based on ~150 students.



where we'll work closely with communities to maximise the impact of the programme. We'll offer more training and support online for any of our teachers globally.

These relationships are at the heart of Topical Talk, as the way we not only support but learn from our teachers and develop the programme with them. One priority is to increase the number of teachers who give us data so we can better understand our impact.

"Students have developed the ability to explain complex concepts and ideas in the news. They are more able to relate what we do in class with the wider world."

Teacher, Bootham School, UK

"Students are becoming more engaged in discussion and research and are beginning to think deeper and make more connections to their world and their learning as they pick up knowledge and information. They are becoming more respectful and appreciative of the views and input of others."

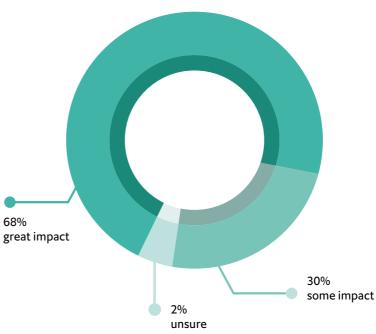
Teacher, Letham Primary school, UK

"Students are more able to relate academic ideas to their context; they ask about how the things we study apply to their lives and think about how to build better communities as a result."

Teacher, Drummond Community High School, UK

Children learned to think and speak well about the news

Teachers* saw an impact on students' knowledge of current affairs.



*Teachers using Topical Talk for >3 months

In class, students built knowledge through activities that broke down issues and created space to think about them.

> "Although sometimes the news is sad, like what I hear about the war with Ukraine and Russia, when I talk about the news I feel better as we are showing respect and awareness of what is happening and can

> > Student, Sacred Heart High School

think about solutions."

"It's a very wonderful feeling when someone comes and asks how, when and where about something in the world and I know the answer!"

Student, Jabalia Preparatory Girls School, Palestine



CASE STUDY

Boutcher Primary school

This case study is a summary of a conversation with the class teacher, Lorna

59 students aged 9-11-years-old take part in Topical Talk. It's run in the curriculum by using one English lesson. Topical Talk works well as a literacy lesson so we feel we can dedicate that time to Topical Talk. An hour and a half on average is given to Topical Talk each week.

The Big corp power topic was particularly popular because it was so relevant to students- we were able to have some really interesting conversations around this. That was one that really gripped them.

One class taking part has a lot of children with SEND and so when we started we felt they would need support from older students, so mixed them up. And seeing how the class began, it is such a change now! They are as vocal as the older students and I think that's down to regular use of Topical Talk.

The great thing about the programme is that there are so many different ways of pacing the lesson - students get used to

paired work and group work. They'd learnt it's okay to change your opinion. Their confidence has grown because there isn't a right and wrong here. I don't believe they would be debating the way they are very deeply for their age- without Topical Talk.

I rave about Topical Talk - my brothers are both secondary teachers and I mention it to them. I said you need to get TT into your curriculum! I 've been doing it for so many years but at the very beginning I was so much more reliant on my script and now I know the ways and I really feel it has made me chase conversations that I wouldn't have had in class before, or that I might be more wary of having. It's definitely something that, if I move to another school, I would be so keen to keep it going as I really feel it's important. As a teacher it's one of my favourite things to do. Facilitating a conversation to get them to lead a conversation among themselves is a rare thing. I love it.



The Big corp power, Special Edition, December 17th 2021

CASE STUDY

Asmaa Preparatory School, Palestine

This case study is a summary of a conversation with the class teacher, Haneen

We run Topical Talk weekly, as an extracurricular club after school, with 30 students aged 13-14-years-old. Students are living in a difficult social context and some of the students taking part have lost their guardians. The club "builds a bridge to the world outside".

Through using the Student Hub, students have moved from copying and pasting information from websites, to developing their own ideas. Students particularly enjoy topics with environmental links, such as the COP26 project, which prompted them to launch a campaign about how to make the school more green. Students have learnt about climate change - this was a bit new for them. Here in Gaza they don't have time to think about these things because of all the difficulties going on. They started establishing new perspectives and learning about global warming.

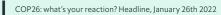
Creating their own work on topics is really useful for them to summarise everything they have learnt. Posting it on the website really helps their writing. This affects their

performance in the classroom, too. On the Hub, students can easily get feedback from their classmates and people all around the world as well as caring feedback from volunteers. A couple of them even had their questions answered by topic experts.

I have two girls who are really shy about speaking. I told them to take part in the Topical Talk project. As they took part, I could see how confident they'd become. They were initiating discussion and felt celebrated. They were sharing ideas with their classmates and their language has changed. They now speak with confidence, which is what we want for our students.

As a teacher, I've also learnt from the resources. They've given me new ways of guiding discussions. They show me how a topic can be introduced to students. We have lots of scientific topics in our curriculum and I was finding it really challenging to introduce. Topical Talk has helped me think about ways to do this.





CASE STUDY

Graveney Secondary School, UK

This case study is a summary of a conversation with the class teacher, Keith

Topical Talk is run with around 12 students aged 11 to 12 years old as an after-school club. Students also take part online at home. For example, encouraging_ elderberry engages frequently outside of school.

We use the Headlines mostly because the weekly changing topics broadens their horizons and provides them with more discussion. Once we start discussing topics you find they are able to access thinking you thought might have been inaccessible. That's one of the things I like - those which look most challenging tend to be the most pleasantly surprising - for example the Business in Russia resource.

The "final pieces" work really well with our Year 7s because it follows the structure of building up to doing something, putting the groundwork in first with discussions and research. Since Day 1 I've always liked it and followed that pattern. It helps them with their learning - it teaches them the importance of research, planning and redrafting.

The resources have become more flexible - and they can be adapted more easily to take our students to a higher level of discussion more easily.

A real motivating factor has been the experts on the Student Hub. Our students do it because they have a vested interest in the news. They turn up because they want to be here. So when they see experts that they know and recognise, it is a really big incentive and those sections are really popular. They like to try and reply to them and this stimulates a lot of discussion.

Without a doubt Topical Talk develops listening. Down in Year 7, it's very common to be super keen to get their voices heard. But what they are not doing is listening to what each other is saying, they're only focussed on what they want to say. Topical Talk focuses on different perspectives and discussion. That massively helps because it makes students realise that it's good to respond but it's so much better to have an informed response.

Students are taking on board the issues and they really enjoy the opportunity to respond to other students, especially internationally. They are much keener to respond to students because they love the idea they're in a different country.

Students are also taking the knowledge they build to other places. Because a lot of the information is so detailed and interesting, they take that away...they'll come back and say "I was talking to my teacher in another subject about this and they didn't know it!"

I think it's always good to reflect on how you teach - and so having the chance to do something outside of my day to day really helps.



Brandlehow Primary School, United Kingdon

What's next?

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What's next?

The steps we took this year set us up to continue scaling up our reach globally while deepening impact by supporting and learning from our growing community of Topical Talk teachers.

Our priorities in 2022 - 23 school year...



Do more to support and learn with teachers

Launch a new Topical Talk Leaders training programme and pilot our first 'excellence hub' working closely with the community in Clayton County, Georgia.



Significantly increase engagement in the online discussions

Launch Topical Talk Festival!



Continue to pursue the new growth that we've unlocked by launching Topical Talk

We aim to reach 8,500 teachers in 2022 - 23 to reach over 200,000 children. Our vision is to reach a million children by 2026, with 100,000 of these having weekly news discussions and seeing transformative impact.



Data, references and thanks



Data and references

Data



References

1 Skills Builder Partnership, 2022 (https://www.skillsbuilder.org/file/essential-skills-tracker-2022)

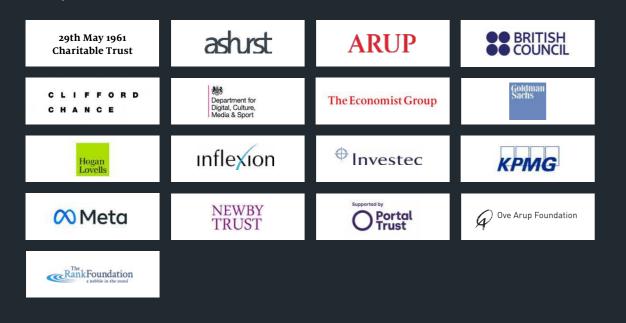
2 Stanford History Education Group, 2019 (<u>https://news.stanford.edu/2019/11/18/high-school-students unequipped-spot-fake-news/</u>) and National Literacy Trust, 2018 (<u>https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/all-party-parliamentary-group-literacy/fakenews/</u>)

3 Skills Builder, 2022 (https://www.skillsbuilder.org/file/impact-report-2022)

4 Skills Builder measuring collective impact, 2018 (https://www.skillsbuilder.org/blog/measuring-collective-impactInstitute)

Thank you

Huge thank you to the generous, creative partners that enable us to deliver and continually develop our work.



45





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