

**Talking Comprehension**  
**Using Discussion to Expand Understanding**  
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**My Road to Talk**

*Macro Structures*

Reading Curriculum & Pedagogy - The Reading Workshop

*Micro Structures*

Lessons in Comprehension

Language of Instruction

Language of Discussions

**Why Focus on Talk?**

Teacher Talk has been institutionalized over the past century.

Language is the Primary Tool used for Teaching and Learning

Creates Opportunities for Sharing Ideas and Interpretations

Is Used to Regulate the Complexity of Learning Events (Scaffolding)

The way teachers talk with students hasn't changed much since Socrates.

If we don't pay conscious attention to the way we talk and the content of our talk, it will never change.

It is the foundation for the Reading Workshop

**The Primary Goal of the Reading Workshop is to Change the Way Teachers & Students Think and Talk About Texts**

**Language Of Lessons**

Calling Attention

Explicit - Focused

Explanatory Talk

Pacing

Objectives

Responses Used to Confirm

**Language of Discussions**

Inviting Participation

Tentative - Open

Exploratory Talk

Wandering

Possibilities

Responses Used to Extend

**Traditional Interactions**

Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (Mehan, 1979)

Residual of Experience - Apprenticeship in Teaching

Default Setting

Authoritarian Discourse - Control

Transmission of Knowledge

**I - R - E**

Teachers Take Turns at Will

Teachers Allocate Turns to Others

Teachers Determine Topics

Teachers Control Pace of Discussion

Teachers Interrupt at Will

Teachers Pose Questions at Will

Teachers Endorse Particular Readings

Teachers End Conversational Turns

### **Research on Types of Talk (Wilkinson, Murphy, Soter)**

Efferent Talk – Focuses on the literal details of text

Aesthetic Talk – Expressing what you like and dislike

Analytic Talk – Interrogating the author and text, raise issues, offer critical responses

### **Interactive Discussions**

Each student is responsible for Articulating their interpretations & ideas to other students  
(Multiple Voices)

The Lines of Communication are from student to student as well as from student to teacher (Two Way Interactions)

Readers need to be Active Listeners during the discussion (Stance)

Meaning is Negotiated through the interactions (Suspend Closure)

### **Setting Expectations**

Ideas are Honestly Reported

Listening Well & Thinking Deeply are As Important As Talking Well

Address Other Students as Well as the Teacher (Avoid Interrupting)

Half Baked Ideas are Accepted and Encouraged

Show Respect When Disagreeing

Consider What Has Been Offered

Be Able to Back Up Your Opinions

### **Dialogue “Blockers”**

Dominating Voices

Passive Participants

Lack of Time

Focus on Debating (Winning)

Seeking Consensus

Defensive Attitudes

Attacking Others

Not Listening

Lack of Contextual Understanding

### **Debra Myhill**

Asking More Open-Ended Questions will NOT Change the Quality of Children’s

Thinking if They Continue to Think There is Only One Correct Answer

(Hidden in the Teacher’s Head)

### **Initial Thoughts on Questions**

Student Responses are Reflective of the Questions Teachers Ask and The Expectations Set for Discussion.

Questions can be Confrontational, Rather Than Invitational.

Too often Questions are Used to Control Rather than Inquire (Who’s Paying Attention?)

Who Gets to ask Questions is Reflective of the Power Relations in the Classroom.

## **Types of Questions**

Display / Rote

Process / Reasoning

Procedural / Expectations

Inquiry / Exploratory

### **Display (Rote) Questions**

Serve as cues to narrow down student guesses to align to what is in the teacher's head or is predetermined as correct

Are Inauthentic - Do Not Regularly Occur Outside of School (Pseudo Questions)

“Oral Fill in the Blanks”

Develops Passive Students

Limits the Range of Acceptable Answers

Strive for Consensus, Agreement, Correctness

### **Process Questions**

Trying to understand students' contemplation or thought processes

Concerned with Cognitive Processes

Thinking “Audit Trail”

#### *EXAMPLES:*

What connections, insights, comparisons did you make as you were reading the text?

How did you generate your ideas?

What ideas, comments, evidence from the text influenced your thinking?

### **Procedural Questions**

Remind students of established procedures and expectations.

Invites students to share experiences and ideas.

Helps facilitate the discussion

#### *EXAMPLES:*

When we are discussing a text, what helps us listen to each other better?

When the teacher is reading a book aloud, what do we do with our post-its on our clipboards, and how do we share ideas?

How do we gain access to the discussion?

### **Inquiry Questions**

Allow for a Range of Acceptable Answers

Go Beyond Literal Recall and Summary

Conceptual the Text as Point of Departure, Not an Intellectual End

Address Multiple Perspectives

Require students to synthesize and analyze textual information

## **Inquiry Questions**

*Noticings:*

What are your initial impressions?

What caught your attention?

What seemed unique, peculiar?

*Generate Meaning:*

What might these noticings mean?

How does this connect with what you know?

What other meanings are possible?

*Co-Elaboration:*

Have you considered other's ideas?

How do alternative interpretations affect your ideas?

What do these ideas mean for your future reading?

## **Using Questions More Effectively**

Teachers should stop asking questions they know the answers to all the time (Integrity).

Teachers Should ask Questions in Response to Students' Ideas Than In Front of Them.

Questions should provide opportunities for students to Confirm, Clarify & Extend.

Questions MUST go beyond recall and Request Evidence of Interpretive Processes.

“Tell Me More” is Better Than “Why?”

Allow Students to ask more questions.

## **Techniques for Improving Classroom Discussions**

Raising Hands Not Necessary to Enter Discussion - “Getting the Floor”

1st Person Plural - Reciprocal Objectives

Student Prep: Notetaking - Post-Its - Coding

Teacher Gaze - Handing Off

Exploratory Pausing (Wait Time)

He Said, She Said, I Think

Charting for Extended Discussions

## **Some Final Considerations**

Most classroom discussion of text focuses on literal details (guess what's in the book)

Adding even small amounts of discussion had positive effects on comprehension

Greatest benefits of adding discussion are for below average and average readers

Students Respond to Statements as Easily as Questions

It Takes Time to Have “Deep” Discussions

## **James Britton**

“Talk is the Ocean on which all Learning Floats”

## **Literacy Website**

[www.frankserafini.com](http://www.frankserafini.com)