Purposeful Talk
Compiled by Candice Johnson, Grades 3-5 Literacy Coach, Fort Atkinson, Summer 2011

Heightening the Level of Talk in Literature Discussion Groups to Engage Students in Deep Comprehension of Text

Based on the Work By Maria Nichols
Purposeful Talk…

What is it?

Why is it important in my classroom?

How does it fit into CLM?
Purposeful talk is focused, collaborative talk; it is a social process that requires students to actively engage with ideas, think out loud together, and work to a co-construction of those ideas.

Nichols, 2009
Importance of Purposeful Talk

- Purposeful talk combines the motor activity of talking with the social interaction of discussion to deepen comprehension.

- Through talk, students learn to interact productively and to understand themselves, others, and topics/ideas in new, more complex ways.
What the research says to support it…

“Effective classroom talk was linked to a high level of student’s thinking and active use of knowledge.”

– Wolf, Crosson, & Resnick, 2004

“Talking with others about ideas and work is fundamental to learning. Strong, purposeful talk is clearly linked to the depth of understanding students are able to achieve.”

– Lucy Calkins, 1999

“Learning is the most effective when classrooms emphasize knowledge derived from active participation in meaningful conversations.”

– Center on English Learning & Achievement, 2006

“Collaborative academic talk is at the heart of the learning experience.”

– Simich-Dudgeon, 1998

Published by Nichols, 2009
“A Big Rock” in the Comprehensive Literacy Model

**ESAIL Criterion 1: Creates a Literate Environment**

- **Descriptor 6:** Problem-solving is collaborative and *talk is purposeful*.
- **Descriptor 8:** *Respectful talk* and attitudes are promoted and used among all learners.
- **Descriptor 9:** *Elaborated discussions* around specific concepts are promoted and students’ thinking is valued and discussed.
- **Descriptor 10:** Classroom environment is conducive to inquiry-based learning and learners are engaged in *constructive interactions* around purposeful literacy events.

Heightened levels of talk help deepen comprehension in Literature Discussion Groups and turn-and-talk experiences throughout the day.

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The Changing Role of the Teacher

BEFORE Purposeful Talk

- “Talk” was not taught.
- Teacher asked questions with “one” or “the” right answer.
- Teacher was the center of the discussion—students interacted with the teacher—not each other.

WITH Purposeful Talk

- Purposeful talk is taught in deliberate, intentional, explicit ways.
- Teacher honors constructivism and allows students to explore ideas as opposed to “right” answers.
- Teacher’s role becomes that of orchestration—cueing the discussion to support the construction of meaning and use of purposeful talk behaviors. (The students interact with each other.)

Nichols, 2009
5 Purposeful Talk Behaviors

- Hear All Voices
- Say Something Meaningful
- Listen With Intent
- Keep Lines of Thinking Alive
- Negotiate Meaning (Be flexible with your thinking.)

“The heightened level of engagement necessary for purposeful talk is something new for our students.”

[Tuning out is no longer acceptable.]

-Nichols, 2006, 29

Maria Nichols, 2006, pages 41-47

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Purposeful Talk

* Focused, collaborative talk meant to DEEPEN and EXTEND our thinking about the topic

1. HEAR ALL VOICES
2. SAY SOMETHING MEANINGFUL
3. PRACTICE S.L.A.N.T.
   - Sit up
   - Look at the person talking
   - Act like you care
   - Nod your head
   - Take turns talking
4. LISTEN WITH INTENT
5. KEEP THE LINES OF THINKING ALIVE
6. BE FLEXIBLE IN YOUR THINKING

Anchor chart courtesy of Leanne Bongers, Grade 4, Barrie Elementary, School District of Fort Atkinson, Fall 2011
1 Hear All Voices

- **Every** student understands his or her role as an active, engaged learner.

- **All** students are thinking and *sharing their thinking with others by talking and contributing to the discussion.*

How will you set and model the expectation that **all** students take an active role in discussions that take place in the classroom?

What guided practice activities can you design to actively engage **all** students in talk?

Nichols, 2009
Considering Gradual Release...

Move from concrete (context outside of literacy/content event to an authentic event)
HEAR ALL VOICES

- Everyone participates!
- Everyone shares their...
  - thinking
  - questions
  - ideas
  - opinions
  - feelings
  - connections
- Everyone is IMPORTANT in deepening comprehension of the text!

Anchor chart courtesy of Candice Johnson, Grade 3, Purdy Elementary, School District of Fort Atkinson, Fall 2011
2 Say Something Meaningful

- Students need to develop their abilities to consider the *power of their thinking* as it relates to the construction of meaning.

- Students need to differentiate between loose associations and *thoughts that support deeper understanding* of the text or topic.

How will you model saying something meaningful when discussing text?

What guided practice activities can you design to actively engage students in saying something meaningful?

Nichols, 2009
Considering Gradual Release...

- Move from concrete (context outside of literacy/content event to an authentic event)
SAY SOMETHING MEANINGFUL

Anchor chart courtesy of Candice Johnson, Grade 3, Purdy Elementary, School District of Fort Atkinson, Fall 2011
3 Listen With Intent

- Understanding what listening is and learning to listen purposefully is crucial to talk purposefully.

- Listening purposefully involves grasping another person’s idea, fully considering it, and actively responding to it with the intent to deepen the discussion.

How will you define listening and model purposeful listening?

What guided practice activities can you design to engage students in purposeful listening so they can respond with intent to say something meaningful?

Nichols, 2009
Considering Gradual Release...

- Move from concrete (context outside of literacy/content event to an authentic event)
LISTEN WITH INTENT

Purposeful Talk

LISTEN WITH INTENT

What it is...
- actively listening to others' thinking so you can respond by saying something meaningful

Remember...
- Hearing is a sound, but 
  LISTENING is a thought!
- Hear with your ears!
- LISTEN with your mind!
  - How?
  - SLANTT
  - GIVE SPEAKER 5!

Anchor chart courtesy of Candice Johnson, Grade 3, Purdy Elementary, School District of Fort Atkinson, Fall 2011
Considering Gradual Release…

- Great resource for developing an understanding of what listening really means.
- Listening must be defined and taught with intention.
- The purpose of listening must be made visible: “We hear with our ears, and we listen with our minds.” –Michael Opitz
4 Keep Lines of Thinking Alive

- When students are able to listen with intent, they can *stay focused on single ideas* and discuss/bold these ideas to their fullest potential.

- Students must learn *to hold onto thoughts that would move the talk in another direction* while another idea is being discussed (before shifting the discussion).

How will you model keeping a single line of thinking alive before moving on to discuss another?

What guided practice activities can you design to help students focus on discussing one idea before developing another?

Nichols, 2009
Considering Gradual Release...

-move from concrete (context outside of literacy/content event to an authentic event)

Q: What’s the best way to...
Q: Who is the best...
A: Option 1, 2, or 3?
KEEP THE LINES OF THINKING ALIVE

Purposeful Talk
KEEP LINES OF THINKING ALIVE

- Discuss and focus on one idea before talking about another
- "Grow" the idea/thinking by building or adding on to what the person before you said!

Idea 1 --> Idea 2 --> Idea 3

Anchor chart courtesy of Candice Johnson, Grade 3, Purdy Elementary, School District of Fort Atkinson, Fall 2011
5 Negotiate Meaning (Be flexible with your thinking.)

> Students need to learn how to *work through differences of opinion in a constructive way*—learning to disagree with respect is crucial. This aides in confirming or changing one’s thinking.

> They need to be taught how to work through ideas that might not make sense, give ideas a chance if they don’t agree, and be *flexible with their own thinking*.

**How will you model negotiating meaning and being flexible with your thinking?**

**What guided practice activities can you design to help students engage in discussions that bring forth differing opinions for students to reflect upon?**

Nichols, 2009
Considering Gradual Release…

Move from concrete (context outside of literacy/content event to an authentic event)
BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOUR THINKING

- listen to others with intent
- respect differences and be willing to explore them ▼ Agree to disagree.
- honor and appreciate new thinking brought to the discussion
- confirm your thinking or change your thinking based on deep discussion

Anchor chart courtesy of Candice Johnson, Grade 3, Purdy Elementary, School District of Fort Atkinson, Fall 2011
Lesson Design with Purposeful Talk

Teachers need to explicitly create norms and skills for purposeful talk in classrooms.

Purposeful talk must be modeled explicitly by the teacher and “deliberately taught, nurtured, and expected.” [Move from concrete experiences to authentic.]

After introducing each talk behavior, future mini-lesson foci are driven by problem-solving around student difficulties with purposeful talk while engaging in [literature] discussions.

Talk behaviors should not be “taught” in isolation—making meaning while engaging in purposeful talk is an equally important outcome for EVERY discussion. **Everything is always about making meaning.**

Nichols, 2009
Outcomes of Purposeful Talk

Students...

- Develop desire/habit to think collaboratively with others about complex ideas and issues

- Develop desire/habit of seeking out others to discuss ideas and issues presented in reading [and the world] knowing that ideas and understandings are strengthened by doing so

- Practice heightened engagement in discussion and critical thinking [in school and beyond]

- Expect that their thinking will be questioned, knowing that it must be supported with evidence in order to feel their own thinking shift and grow

Nichols, 2009
Outcomes of Purposeful Talk

Students...

- Question their own interpretations of text, anticipate alternative views, weigh evidence, and develop their own ideas thoughtfully so that their thinking is strong *BEFORE* they engage in discussion with others.

- Develop the habit of using their constructed understandings of text and ideas to better understand and engage with their world, questioning, hypothesizing, and acting upon their knowledge in positive ways.

Nichols, 2009
While this all may seem daunting at first, [for both the teacher and students] it grows easier over time, even to the point of being second nature [and this is the ultimate goal].

-Maria Nichols, 2009, 15
Comprehension Through Conversation: The Power of Purposeful Talk in the Reading Workshop

By Maria Nichols
Images courtesy of Google Images  www.google.com/images

