The Power of Purposeful Talk: Exploring and Building Dialogic Classrooms

Maria Nichols
mnichols45@gmail.com
@marianichols45
#BuildingBiggerIdeas

If learning, particularly that which takes place in a classroom, floats on a sea of talk, what kind of talk? And, what kind of learning?

~ Simpson, Mercer, and Majors
inspired by the work of Douglas Barnes

Our time together...

Exploring:
• What kind of talk?
• What kind of learning?

Building:
• And, what kind of teaching?

What kind of talk?
• Constructive
• Values varied perspectives
• Takes place over extended space and time
WHAT KIND OF LEARNING...?

Dialogic classrooms are ... 

...places where teachers engage students in processes for learning about talk and through talk simultaneously.

~ Ruppert Wegerif

Purposeful talk behaviors

- Hearing all voices
- Growing ideas
  - Say something meaningful
  - Listen with intent
  - Keep lines of thinking alive
- Negotiating meaning

~ Nichols 2006, 2019

...AND, WHAT KIND OF TEACHING?
Shifting our teaching…

I.R.E.
- Monologic, focus on individual
- Confirm reception and retention of information (extrinsic, passive)
- Right answer
- Often single word (yes/no) or fill-in-the-blank
- Expectation of fully formed, structured thought
- Teacher as evaluator

Predictable teaching for unpredictable talk

- Gently focus
- Authentically facilitate
- Offer feedback

When we focus…
- We create mindfulness about talk
- We remind children of the power of talk
- We nudge for strategic talk behavior

When we facilitate…
- …we take an inquiry stance, listening to the flow of children’s talk, alert for constructive possibilities.
- Authentic facilitation is:
  - invitational
  - responsive
  - agentive
  - meaning driven

Nichols, 2019
When we offer feedback…

- We describe children’s talk behavior
- We link their talk behavior to meaning making
- We remind them to draw on these strategies and behaviors to think and talk together this way without us

~ Nichols, 2019

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Dialogic

- Focus on collaboration
- Use talk to explore and construct understanding (intrinsic, active)
- Range of possibilities
- Lots of exploratory talk to support thinking and comprehensible output
- Tentativeness valued as part of the process of constructing meaning
- Teacher as facilitator

Compelling texts …

- focus on ideas that are real, relevant, complex, and dynamic
- have characters that are relatable, complex, and imperfect
- resist closure
- offer fodder for thinking about the world beyond the text
- touch the heart as well as the mind.

~ Maria Nichols, 2019

Hearing all voices

- Pay attention to facial expressions
  » I’m noticing shaking/nodding heads…
- Honor questions
  » What are you wondering?
- Invite tentative thinking
  » Who has a thought?
  » Is anyone wondering…?
- Invite others into the conversation
  » Who haven’t we heard from?

~ Maria Nichols 2019
Facilitative language supports

The power of purposeful talk

... learning, thinking, knowing, and understanding are significantly enhanced when one is provided with opportunities for "talking one's way to meaning", both with others and with oneself.

~ Brian Cambourne,