Discourse: Teacher Talk

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Essential Question(s)

- How does effective discourse training improve schools and student learning?

Summary

In this professional learning activity, participants explore what characterizes effective communication and productive discourse through several strategies, including drawing, norms setting, a silent debate, collaborative concept mapping, and collaborative goal setting.

Learning Goals

1. Identify the research-based elements of effective discourse.
2. Apply concepts from research to a conversation.
3. Generate personal goals to foster discourse in their professional community.

Attachments

- Discourse Concept Map-Discourse-Teacher Talk.docx
- Discourse Concept Map-Discourse-Teacher Talk.pdf
- Discourse Practitioner_s Brief — Teacher Talk.pdf
- Paper Telephone Prompts-Discourse-Teacher Talk.docx
- Paper Telephone Prompts-Discourse-Teacher Talk.pdf
- Presentation Slides - Teacher Talk.pptx
- Strike Out-Discourse-Teacher Talk.docx
- Strike Out-Discourse-Teacher Talk.pdf
- Teacher Talk-Discourse.pdf

Materials

- Presentation Slides
- Paper Telephone Prompts-Discourse Handout (one per person)
- Strike Out-Discourse Teacher Talk (one per person)
- Teacher Talk-Discourse (one per person)
- Discourse Practitioner's Brief (one per person)
- Discourse Concept Map handout (one per person)
- Scrap/blank paper
- Chart paper
- Pens or pencils
- Markers

10 minutes

Engage

Facilitator Note: Preparation

Note: Print out the **Paper Telephone discourse** prompts. Fold them. Ideally this would be a color or slightly thicker paper so that participants can't see through it when it's folded. You might also opt to simply use a stack of index cards and have them move the card to back after viewing for the next person. Watch this video if you'd like to see how this game should look in action before facilitating: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5aj3qCs144.

Introduce the session and then move on to display **slide 3**. Ask participants to arrange themselves so that there are 4-5 people at each table and ensure they have a pen or pencil to draw with. Move to **slide 4**. Then go over the instructions on the slide. It might help to explain that this is like the old-school telephone game, except with drawing added to the mix. Or if they've played the party game Telestrations, this activity is a version of that. Once you have explained the Paper Telephone game, hand out the stacks of note cards and prompts (folded to keep secret) and instruct each person to make sure they are the only person at their table who can read their prompt.

Designate a bell or cue to let participants know when to pass their stack. First, each player reads the prompt at the top of their template, folds the page back to hide the prompt from the next person, and then draws their first illustration of that prompt. At the cue, everyone will pass their stack to the person on their right. This person will look at the illustration in front of them and then write words to describe the illustration in the next section of the template. They will move the card with the illustration back to hide it from the next person and pass to their right. The next player will create a new drawing to represent the words written by the person before them. Move to the back to the card with the words the previous player wrote and then pass to their right one last time. This should bring it back to the first person who had the prompt. They will write one more time a few words to describe what they see in the drawing. Then, have each participant share their stack with their whole table from the original prompt through all of the interpretations.

Debrief this activity as a non-example of effective discourse. Ask if anyone is feeling upset about how poorly the drawings were interpreted. Ask if anyone cheated and looked at the paper. This will lead us into a professional conversation about the characteristics of productive discourse.

Display **slide 5**. Debrief this activity as a non-example of effective discourse. Ask if anyone is upset about how poorly the drawings were interpreted. Ask if anyone cheated and looked at the paper. These responses will lead to a professional conversation about the characteristics of productive discourse.

Display **slide 6** and invite discussion of the essential question.

20 minutes

Explore

Review the session objectives displayed in **slide 7**.

Participants should reflect on what is missing in the Paper Telephone activity that leads to any wild misinterpretations from the original prompt. During this activity, the facilitator will write down each of the shared ideas on a piece of chart paper.

Let participants know that we will keep these characteristics in mind for the remainder of our session today. Our first chance to practice is in our next activity which will be a Silent Debate.

Facilitator Note: Preparation

Before this session, write in marker and large handwriting on chart paper or print and glue to chart paper some of the following debate topics depending on the size of your group. This is a suggested list. Feel free to modify the topics for your audience:

- Social media has ruined modern discourse.
- Cross-curricular discourse is always beneficial.
- Email is preferable to face-to-face meeting.
- Gifs, which can convey motion and animation, are more effective that emojis.
- Telephoning has been replaced by texting because texting is more efficient.
- With the expansion of electronic communication, grammar is losing its importance.

Display **slide 8**. Provide each table group a poster with an item from the list above.

Invite the group to examine characteristics that make up effective discourse and ask them to determine what norms they want to follow for this discussion and for subsequent exercises about discourse. Refer to the strategy Establishing Norms.

Display **slide 9**. Using the Chalk Talk strategy, ask participants to write down their thoughts on each debate topic in pen or pencil on the chart paper in the space around the topic. They should read what their table members write and respond to each other in writing. No talking is permitted during this part of the activity. Before beginning, ask to see if anyone has questions about the directions before you start timing. Silence is expected. Allow about 15 minutes for the silent part of this activity.

Next, set the timer to 15 minutes again. This time all participants can walk around the room to view other table's papers and write in responses to the contributions already made for each topic.

Display **slide 10.** After 15 minutes have passed, participants have the opportunity to discuss their topics or any of the topics they've seen. During this time, they should arrive at their table with an elevator pitch summary on the characteristics and values of productive discourse.

Have each table share their summary to the whole room.

Return to a whole group conversation about what characteristics are needed for effective discourse. They should reflect on the experience they had during the silent debate and how this strategy supports discourse. During this activity, the facilitator will add the comments that have been shared to the chart.

20 minutes

Explain

Display **slide 11**. Handout the **Discourse Practitioner's Brief**, the Teacher Talk Aid, and the **Discourse Concept Map** template. Provide time for participants to read through the brief and ask them to demonstrate their understanding of the characteristics and values of productive discourse on their Concept Map template. This is a long brief, so be sure to allot sufficient time for reading and reflection.

10 minutes

Extend

Display **slide 12**. Once everyone has finished reading and mapping, use the Give, Get, Reflect strategy. This strategy asks that partners share their responses with other participants and listen to their responses. Participants then reflect on what they have learned from listening to the ideas of others and check to see whether their thinking has or has not changed about the question.

Ask participants to trade maps with an Elbow Partner. Then as partners, they should have a discussion about the differences and similarities in their concept maps.

Then, have pairs share at their table the point of most significance from their discussions with their elbow partners.

Display **slide 13**. Following this activity, return to the Characteristics that you recorded on the board earlier in this session. Ask the whole group if anyone would like to add to this. At this point, it doesn't just have to be norms but could be general characteristics or conditions for healthy discourse. We've revisited this list twice before, but this time specifically reflect on the research and determine if there is anything that needs to be added, revised, or clarified.

10 minutes

Evaluate

Show **slide 14** to guide reflection. Using the **Strike Out handout**, have participants individually reflect on and write down three ways/goals for improving discourse. Then have participants share at their tables the three goals they chose as the most important for improving student learning or your school through discourse. As a table, participants should narrow down to the one most important question prompt relating to each person's notions of effective discourse.

Research Rationale

Improved educational outcomes can become a reality when a range of stakeholders come together in a community of practice and share their expertise in identifying issues of concern and develop strategies to address these issues to achieve common goals (Dodman et al., 2019; Charteris & Smarden; 2019a; Evans-Winters et al., 2018; Harris & Harrington, 2006; Simoncini et al., 2014). Following the guidelines for effective discourse does not guarantee that we can magically become better communicators and that our students will benefit. They are, however, a step in the right direction, particularly when integrating inquiry with discourse toward more just decision-making and practices in education (Akinyemi et al., 2019; Gardner-Neblett & Humphries, 2021).

Resources

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