Student Paired Talk

During a recent PLC observation, where I was invited to provide coaching, teachers, their instructional coach, and principal were observing a video clip of a teacher's writing lesson. In the section they were observing, the teacher had students on the floor around her as she reviewed writing components and connected them to a recent activity the whole class had experienced.

Students responded to prompts that she provided by pairing and answering to each other. As the group discussed the observation of the clip with the teacher, she suggested that she needed to provide her students more specific instructions on expectations for paired talk. The PLC conversation concluded that this strategy was important and that it might be worth examining with the entire staff.

I shared with the PLC a resource I had recently found when attending a presentation by Brianna Gray and Jake Rosch. Jake and Brianna are middle school teachers at ACS international School. As part of the school's **Center for Inspiring Minds**, they conducted a study of student to student dialogue. Working with a project team of teachers, they researched, trained, practiced, observed, documented, and reflected on using the practice in classrooms.

They captured their experiences in an awesome ibook that's available as a free download at www.talkinginclass.com . I recommend it highly. They provide a great review of research, their process and findings, including video interviews with teachers and students.

Approximately 50% Brianna's and Jake's middle school students do not have English as their first language and nearly 20% are considered beginners in English proficiency. The ibook provides a chapter on academic vocabulary and the research

benefits of paired dialogue:

1) Using new words in authentic discourse is vital for lasting learning.

2) Students must use words in slightly new ways and in different contexts to make them solidify in the brain.

3) The more students converse about a topic, the more they report feeling intelligent and more capable in their ability to talk about what they are learning.

4) Conversation builds oral language, which is a foundation for reading and writing.

5) Students who engage in conversations with academic content build their "academic identity" and as a result have more confidence in their ability to engage with others in academic discourse.

Another resource, especially for primary teachers, is **Talk Partners; A Guidance Booklet for Schools.** They cite the following benefits of paired talk:

- provides an opportunity for all children to speak and listen to each other;
- helps children to generate ideas, views and opinions safely;
- provides the opportunity for all children to voice their understanding of ideas, concepts, vocabulary and linguistic conventions;
- enables participation by children who might not be as confident in the whole class situation;
- helps in the rehearsal of words and phrases before committing them to paper or contributing to a larger audience;
- develops thinking, speaking, listening, collaborative and cooperative skills;
- ensures all children are involved in the lesson;

- encourages the involvement of boys;
- enables children to learn from each other;
- provides thinking time;
- encourages extended responses;
- develops coherent thinking;
- develops ‘process talk’ (thinking through talk);
- provides opportunities for adults to observe, listen to and assess children’s understanding.

Jake and Brianna focused on developing five core academic conversation skills that they pulled from the work of Zwiers and Crowford (2011) **Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk That Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings:**

Elaborate and Clarify

Students are encourage to prompt their peers with probes and active listening.

Support Ideas with Examples

Using examples to support ideas has to do with explaining concepts and ideas with text and personal experiences.

Build on or Challenge a Partner’s Idea

When building on and/or challenging others’ ideas, students do not focus on “winning” the conversation. Instead, this skill teaches students to seek to understand the message of others through inquiry, while linking their own ideas.

Paraphrase

The paraphrasing skill teaches students to understand, organize and retell what was understood in their own words. When a listener paraphrases what was said, it allows the listener to clarify the idea to accurately convey his/her message.

Synthesize Conversation Points

Synthesizing information involves taking in information, breaking it down into paraphrased chunks and putting together a thoughtful conclusion.

As I review that list I believe we need to be building the same skillset among teachers to enhance the effectiveness of PLCs.