**Teacher Talk v. Student Talk**

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For the purposes of this week’s critical thinking assignment, I observed a “circle time” lesson in my son’s kindergarten class. Since I am not presently teaching, I wanted to observe a seasoned educator with an age group that I am interested in working with once I enter a school environment.

The lesson I observed focused on what it takes to make things grow. The lesson and accompanying activities took about 45 minutes to complete. To start off the lesson, the students were read a story called “Zinnia’s Flower Garden.” After story time was completed, the students learned a Mucho Mundo song called “Flores Bonitas” – where they focused on learning theme-related Spanish vocabulary. To finish out the lesson, the students participated in a rhythm and notes activity where they got to move around the room with rainbow scarves.

While the children seemed to enjoy the activities, about 80% of the talking was teacher-talk, rather than student-talk. According to Hattie (2018), teachers can ask between 200 and 300 questions a day – whereas students typically ask clarification questions. Research also indicates that teachers should limit their speaking to 20-30% of the class time and the student talk time should be around 80%. These percentages were flipped during my observation. ​According to the article "Teacher Talk Time and Student Talk Time" (2015):

* *Teacher talk time and student talk time should be planned into lessons*
* *Teacher talk should only be about 20-30% of the class time*
* *80% of class time should be dedicated to allowing students to express their thoughts*

In addition, when teachers allow students to have more talk time, the following is able to take place:

* *Students will learn that when the teacher is talking it is only to give out vital information and will therefore be more likely to listen*
* *When students talk about material, it increases their retention of knowledge*
* *Students are more likely to collaborate with other students to gain a better understanding of the material*
* *Allowing student to think things through on their own increases the challenge of the task*

During story time, the teacher read the story, then asked students pointed, close-ended questions to check for understanding; like “who was the main character in the story?” When the students answered, their answers were short, and often, and the teacher did not ask additional follow-up questions to see if she could get the students to elaborate on their answers. The teacher was, however, able to get the students talking more when she asked open-ended questions. For example: “Tell me about your favorite part of the story.” Each student wanted to talk about why they chose the part of the story that was their favorite – and were more actively engaged. Their attitudes visibly changed when they were able to elaborate and when their answers were more personal.

For the song, the children listened and then repeated it back. The song went as follows:

“Las rosas son flores. Flores bonitos! Las margaritas son flores.

Flores bonitos! Las rosas son rojas. Flores bonitos! Las margaritas son

amarillas. Flores bonitos!”

The song the students learned is utilized in a way to help focus on the theme-specific Spanish vocabulary the students are currently working on.

* “Crecer” (grow)
* “El sol” (the sun)
* “El agua” (the water)
* “Las flores” (the flowers)

Again, this was an activity that was driven primarily by the teacher. The students listened to the teacher and repeated back to her. This activity, while necessary for the lesson, did not provide room for student talk.

The students seemed the most engaged during the rainbow scarves activity – probably due to the fact that it was more active whereas the other activities were more passive. The students were able to laugh, sing and converse with each other. It was interesting to watch their faces during each of the lesson activities. During teacher-talk driven activities, the students seemed more passive – almost robotic. "During teacher talk, Students are “physically present, passively engaged, but psychologically absent,” (Hattie, 2012, pg. 81). During student-talk driven moments, the students seemed more energetic and engaged. There were bright smiles and the over-all mood and feel of the classroom drastically changed.

Overall, the teacher was primarily the one in charge and the one doing the majority of the speaking. Something that I did not initially take in to consideration when it came to teacher talk was the time that the teacher had to take to re-direct the students’ attention. The students were told to “catch a bubble” if they were talking instead of listening or repeating “all eyes on me” when the teacher counted “one, two, three”. With students of this age, I feel that this is somewhat unavoidable and adds to the time the teacher spends speaking. Perhaps this is why more of the activities are focused on teacher-talk time rather than student-talk time. At times, it was very difficult for the teacher to get the students back on track.

According to “Teacher Talk Time vs Student Talk Time” (2015), small changes can be implemented in the classroom to get kids talking more and teachers talking less.

1. Don’t steal the struggle – allow students to work through
2. Move from the front of the classroom
3. Teach students signals for your often-repeated phrases and transitions
4. Use non-verbal reinforcement for behavior whenever possible
5. Turn your statements into questions/prompts
6. Ask “can you put that in your own words” rather than “does that make sense”
7. Stop repeating yourself
8. Notice moments when you summarize/review for students and get their input instead (Teacher Talk Time vs Student Talk Time, 2015).

I was most struck by working to utilize non-verbal reinforcement. That, in itself, could cut back on the teacher-talk time significantly – especially when it comes to re-directing the students’ attention. These tips also reinforced the power of open-ended questions as well as focusing on gathering the students’ input.

After observing the lesson, I decided to create a simple teacher-talk time/student-talk time tracking sheet. I wanted it to be something simple that could be used for teacher observations. Each time the teacher talks, a tally mark is added to the teacher section. Each time a student talks, a tally mark is added to the student section.



Tracking teacher and student talk can be difficult, however, tracking this information is essential for teachers as they try to understand what they students are really learning from their classroom lessons -- as well as shifting the classroom dynamic to a more student-talk-friendly atmosphere.

Overall, the focus needs to be on the students themselves – allow them to lead the lessons by encouraging them to talk rather than standing in front and lecturing. By emphasizing the importance of students taking the lead, speaking, asking questions and openly discussing classroom communities where all students are heard and all voices are a part of the learning can be created and established.

This observation opened my eyes to the fact that teachers may not fully be aware of how much they are speaking. Self-reflection is important. Teachers should check themselves as well as their talk. They need to ask their students for input. And, most importantly, they need to work to change their ways. In my opinion, I don’t believe that teachers want to be main voice of the classroom. However, changes need to me made to truly change the ratio of teacher talk time and student talk time.

References

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