Rethinking Whole Class Discussion

June 24, 2013

Whole class discussions are, after lecture, the second most frequently used teaching strategy, one [mandated](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/SL) by the Common Core State Standards because of its many rewards: increased perspective-taking, understanding, empathy, and higher-order thinking, [among others](http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/supportresources/lecturersteachingstaff/developmentprogrammes/BrookfieldPreskillSummary.pdf). These benefits, however, do not manifest without a skillful and knowledgeable facilitator.

Unfortunately, a preponderance of [evidence](http://cet.usc.edu/resources/teaching_learning/docs/Asking_Better_Questions.pdf) demonstrates that many teachers mistakenly conflate discussion with **recitation**. "Typical teacher-student discourse resembles a quiz show, with teachers asking a question, the student replying, and the teacher evaluating the student's response. This is called initiation-response-evaluation, 'I-R-E,' or recitation."*1*

In contrast to recitation, quality discussion, according to the University of Washington's [Center for Instructional Development and Research](http://www.washington.edu/teaching/files/2012/12/Discussion.pdf), involves purposeful questions prepared in advance, assessment, and starting points for further conversations. Teachers are also advised to:

* Distribute opportunities to talk
* Allow discussants to physically see each other
* Ask questions that "may or may not have a known or even a single correct answer"*2*
* Foster learners talking to peers*3*
* Encourage students to justify their responses
* Vary the types of questions

### The Problem with Question Taxonomies

Many instructors reference question taxonomies while planning, such as Barbara Gross Davis' [inventory](https://docs.google.com/a/edutopia.org/viewer?url=http://econscience.org/scott/uw/ta/training/Sept2000/word_docs/Questions.Levels.and.Types.doc), the [Socratic Questions](http://www.umich.edu/~elements/probsolv/strategy/cthinking.htm), or the question set recommended by Stephen Brookfield:

* **Epistemological:** Why does the author believe that \_\_\_?
* **Experiential:** What have you encountered that makes you think that \_\_\_?
* **Communicative:** How does the author rhetorically convey her theme?
* **Political:** What groups would take issue with the implicit message that \_\_\_?

Developing questions that align with the ubiquitously misused [New Bloom's Taxonomy](http://ww2.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm) -- starting a discussion with recall questions and stair-stepping through the rest until higher order prompts are dispatched -- has been sold as a pathway to cognitive vigor. Observe how many classrooms have Bloom's Taxonomy posted on the back wall for the teacher to reference. Over-reliance on question hierarchies can result in conversations that are irrelevant to the content and context of the learning environment, and invite answers that nobody cares about.

Claims by commercial texts often employ jargon to defend discussion routines that are unsupported by research, with the exception of studies commissioned by companies selling curriculum materials and tests. Covering all of the question types at the end of a basal reading does not ensure cognitive gains. Also in dispute is the entrenched belief that asking higher-order questions leads to higher levels of thinking (see reviews of meta-studies [here](http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED226372.pdf) and [here](http://www.education.com/reference/article/questioning/#D)).

With well over 30 question classification systems, how do you choose those that hold the most promise? According to sociolinguists, the answer depends on the context in which they are used.*4*

Rather than habitually adhering to any of the hierarchical question sets during class dialogues (a non-hierarchical approach, Christenbury and Kelly's [Questioning Circles](http://edtheory.blogspot.com/2012/10/going-around-in-questioning-circles.html) offer strategies for crafting "dense" prompts that integrate the subject, world and reader), I suggest that instructors direct their attention to modeling inquiry, emphasizing [divergent over convergent](http://www.cascaeducation.ca/files/proAstro_questions.html) questions, organizing students' approach to question-asking and -answering, listening, and providing authentic follow-up questions. Because of the complexity of these practices, robots will not replace teachers anytime soon.

### The Mechanics of In-Class Discussion

#### Follow-Up Questions

[Ian Wilkinson](http://www.edutopia.org/%20http%3A/www.education.com/reference/article/questioning/#D) defines authentic follow-up as "questions that the teacher is genuinely interested in exploring and that evoke a variety of responses from students (in other words, the answer is not pre-specified)." Good follow-up questions expand the conversation and require students to:

* Clarify their answers: Tell me more about that.
* Support their answers: What about the reading made you think that \_\_\_?
* Argue: Convince us that \_\_.
* Examine their responses more fully: In what other context does that idea play out?
* Consider different perspectives: What would you say to someone who thought \_\_\_?
* Predict: What do you think that we will discover in the next chapter?
* Hypothesize: How would handle a situation like \_\_\_?
* Decide: So, this leads to you to what conclusions?
* Compare: How is your answer different or the same from others?
* Generalize: What did you discover?

#### Avoid the Following

* Trick questions
* Inadequate wait time (less than 3-5 seconds)
* Lectures disguised as questions
* Sarcasm
* Questions with obvious answers
* Asking multiple questions before allowing response
* [Rhetorical](http://rhetoric.byu.edu/figures/r/rhetorical%20questions.htm) questions
* Yes or no questions

#### Set Parameters

Many learners need to be taught how to engage in an academic dialogue -- particularly ELL/ESL students. Provide conversation stems on a poster board or notecards:

* "Could you tell me more about why \_\_\_?"
* "Let me explain why I see that differently."
* "Have you considered \_\_\_?"
* "What we both agree on is \_\_\_."

#### A Handy Playbook

Lastly, I've provided a general checklist of items to consider when planning a discussion:

* Room layout (ensure discussants can see each other)
* Clarify objectives, purpose, relevance and [ground rules](http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/aiseminars/cedi/mijacedi/)
* Front-load rehearsal activities:
	+ [Think-pair-share](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/cl1/cl/doingcl/thinkps.htm)
	+ [Quickwrite](http://www.upei.ca/uwc/wac/strategies/quickwrite.html)
	+ Survey questions
	+ [Mindmaps](http://litemind.com/what-is-mind-mapping/)
	+ [Text annotation](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/teaching-student-annotation-constructing-1132.html)
* Engage students with the first question
	+ [10 Ways to Start a Discussion](http://www.carroll.edu/msmillie/Honorscholars/TenWaysDisc.html)
* Vary the whole class format:
	+ [Fishbowl](http://itcilo.wordpress.com/2009/02/16/facilitate-a-fishbowl-discussion/)
	+ [Future's Wheel](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/futures-wheel.htm)
	+ [Socratic Seminar](https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/bring-socratic-seminars-to-the-classroom)
	+ [Round Table](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/cl1/cl/doingcl/brain.htm)
	+ [Case Study](http://www.uww.edu/Learn/improve_case_studies.php)
* Conduct formative assessment with these questions:
	+ What conclusions have we drawn so far?
	+ What part of our discussion is the most confusing?
	+ What questions should we focus on next?

 Plan for exigencies

* Strategize how you will deal with students who [dominate](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/disruptive-student-behavior-the-case-of-talkative-nancy/22948), are off topic, inaccurate or [unresponsive](http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/provost/file116040.pdf)?
* [Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom](http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/hotmoments.html)

 Plan how you will end the conversation

* See [Carnegie Mellon's](http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/instructionalstrategies/discussions.html) section on closure
* [Summarization techniques](http://wvde.state.wv.us/strategybank/summarization.html)
* [The One-Minute Paper](http://adjunctassistance.com/1899/the-one-minute-paper)

 Assess the conversation with these discussant rubrics:

* [Example 1](http://bestpracticeslegaled.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/class_discussion_rubric.pdf)
* [Example 2](https://docs.google.com/a/edutopia.org/viewer?url=http://cte.sfasu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Discuss.doc)
* [Example 3](https://docs.google.com/a/edutopia.org/viewer?url=http%253A%252F%252Fcw.routledge.com%252Ftextbooks%252F9780415898133%252Fdata%252FDiscussion+Rating+Scale+Template.docx)

Are You a Whole Class Discussion Expert?

Take the quiz:

1. True or false? Teachers lecture more than they use questioning.
2. True or false? Asking questions more frequently leads to higher levels of thinking.
3. The ideal wait time after asking a question is how many seconds?
	* 1-2
	* 2-3
	* 3-5
4. Teachers spend how much of class time talking?
	* Over 30%
	* Over 50%
	* Over 70%
	* Over 90%
5. Do groups larger than three, five or seven discourage students from participating?
6. Girls talk less frequently when academic conversations are perceived as what?
	* Combative
	* Pointless
	* Too lengthy.

Answers to quiz:

1. True (Wilen, 1991)
2. False. Asking questions does, however, improve factual knowledge. (Good & Brophy, 2000)
3. 3-5 seconds (Rowe, 1974; Tobin, 1986)
4. 75% (Dillon, 1988; Hunkins, 1995; Brice & Johnson, 1995)
5. 7 (Cohen, 1994)
6. Too lengthy (Larson & Kieper, 2013)

Notes

*1(2007). Teacherknowledge - Discussion - Recitation - Lecture. Retrieved June 10, 2013, from* [*http://teacherknowledge.wikispaces.com/Discussion+-+Recitation+-+Lecture*](http://teacherknowledge.wikispaces.com/Discussion%2B-%2BRecitation%2B-%2BLecture)*.
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3Facilitating Effective Classroom Discussions. Retrieved June 10, 2013, from* [*http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/tc/discussion.htm*](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/tc/discussion.htm)*.
4Cazden, C. (2001).* Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.*

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/rethinking-whole-class-discussion-todd-finley>

## Cazden on Classroom Discourse

Educator and applied linguist, Courtney Cazden, offered the first significant scholarship on classroom language, in her critical examination of the dynamics of teacher and student talk.

Any social institution can be considered a communication system. In the words of one linguist, Michael Halliday: “Its very existence implies that communication takes place within it; there will be sharing of experience, expression of social solidarity, decision making and planning, and, if it is a hierarchical institution, forms of verbal control, transmission of order, and the like.”  But while other institutions, such as hospitals serve their clients in nonlinguistic ways, the basic purpose of school is achieved through communication.

Several features of education institutions make communication so central. First, spoken language is the medium by which much teaching takes place, and in which students demonstrate to teachers much of what they have learned … .

Second, classrooms are among the most crowded of human environments. Few adults spend as many hours per day in such crowded conditions. Classrooms are similar in this respect to restaurants and buses or subways. But in such places simultaneous conversations are normal, whereas in classrooms one person, the teacher, is responsible for controlling all the talk that occurs while class is officially in session—controlling not just negatively, as a traffic officer does to avoid collisions, but also positively, to enhance the purposes of education.

Third, and perhaps least obviously, spoken language is an important part of the identities of all the participants. Variation in ways of speaking is a universal fact of social life. Schools are the first large institution to which children come from their families and home neighborhoods, and in which they are expected to participate individually and publicly (in contrast, for example, to simply sitting and standing at appropriate times and joining in prayers and songs in church). Especially during the period of school consolidation and desegregation, and the continuing migration across state and national borders, classrooms usually include people—adults and children—from different linguistic backgrounds.

Differences in how something is said, and even when, can be matters of only temporary adjustment, or they can seriously impair effective teaching and accurate evaluation. For all these reasons, it is essential to consider the classroom communication system as a problematic medium that cannot be ignored, or viewed as transparent, by anyone interested in teaching and learning. …

Classroom discourse happens *among* students and teacher. But arguably the most important goal of education is change *within* each student that we call learning. How do the words spoken in classrooms affect this learning? How does the observable classroom discourse affect the unobservable thinking of each of the students, and thereby the nature of what they learn? In the words of Douglas Barnes, written twenty-five years ago and quoted in the introduction to this book’s first edition, how does speech *unite the cognitive and the social?* In the more recent words of anthropologist Barbara Rogoff, how can we best understand relationships among three “planes of analysis” of any event: individual development, social interaction, and the cultural activities in which both take place?’

It is never easy to talk about relationships between individual (silent) thinking processes and the dyadic or group (often noisy) interactions in the classroom. But because that relationship is at the heart of student learning and must therefore be at the heart of teachers’ planning, we have to try. …

Creating the conditions for the interdependent goals of academic and language development for all students requires changes in classroom language use … . It’s a big job, and teachers can’t make these changes alone. Contexts are nested, from the most immediate to the act of speaking to the more distant: classroom, school, district, and so on. Plus, the classroom context is never wholly of the participants’ making.’ Bracketing out such influences … and considering classroom discourse as if it were autonomous, is expedient for teachers and researchers. But those who help to shape the contexts that surround the classroom have to realize their responsibility as well.

Some teachers will want to take on the added work of trying to influence policies that affect their work. That’s where teacher research comes in. In addition to refining education in their own classrooms, teachers’ research can contribute local evidence to discussions about educational policies in their schools and districts. That evidence, like the evidence from text or personal experiences provided by student speakers, makes teachers’ statements in such forums “accountable” too?

Finally, a word from one teacher to others. Thinking about the research reported [here] inevitably will lead to greater self-consciousness, at least temporarily. It has for me, when teaching in San Diego and since, and I wish it didn’t have to happen. I wish we as teachers could be as successful as so many parents on intuition alone. But as anthropologist Edward Sapir explains: “It is sometimes necessary to become conscious of the forms of social behavior in order to bring about a more serviceable adaptation to changing conditions.” Or, in his blunter words, analysis and conscious control are “the medicine of society, not its food.”

Because of conditions both within the classroom and outside it, we need the “medicine” of more careful analysis and conscious control so that our implicit theories of the language of teaching and learning can be open to continual re-vision. Nothing less does justice to our profession and our children.

<http://newlearningonline.com/literacies/chapter-14/cazden-on-classroom-discourse>

**M**iddle school students who are struggling with literacy present teachers with essentially two instructional problems:

1) Classroom instruction must be organized to enable their full active participation in ways that expand their literate competence. Historically, less successful students have encountered different treatment from more successful students, particularly in terms of the social interactions in which they are engaged.[1](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#1) Countering this means arranging for classroom literate activities that are sufficiently permeable to enable all students to participate and understanding how to arrange for productive responses to their efforts.[2](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#2)

2) These students must get special focused instruction, not simply to raise their reading and writing competence, but to accelerate the rate of their acquisition of reading and writing.[3](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#3)

Since middle school teachers commonly have little background in reading and writing, it is necessary that schools and districts provide opportunities for them to develop their understandings of the strengths and challenges struggling students bring with them, and to expand their repertoire of strategies for working with these students.

Classroom environments. Effective curriculum and instruction for struggling readers has the same basis as effective curriculum and instruction for all students. The research of CELA and others has identified the following basic features of the most effective instruction. It

* uses diversity to enhance learning,
* increases the cohesiveness of curriculum and instruction,
* raises the level of student engagement in higher order talk and writing,
* aligns curriculum with assessment, and
* scaffolds student performance of new and difficult tasks.

In the remainder of this article we focus on research about helping struggling middle school readers by incorporating these features into instruction. Although the features apply to all students, students having most difficulty in becoming fully literate are the most vulnerable to lapses in any of these areas. And because many of the features are linked together, lapses in any one can produce chains of unproductive interactions. For example, when struggling readers are expected to read the same material as other students as their exclusive or primary material, they are often unable to behave independently, to self-correct, or to take an active role in problem solving. Reading speed drops, along with volume and interest, meaning gets lost, and places for productive conversations are consequently reduced. Despite the teacher's intentions, these students thus experience a different curriculum than their classmates. At the same time and as a result, the teacher's attention is drawn most strongly to the many things that the child cannot do, a negative frame that is passed on to the child with further consequences, including unproductive classroom relationships. Consequently, the least competent students need to have the features of effective instruction most carefully and thoughtfully applied.

Successful interventions. Some apparently successful interventions for middle school students experiencing difficulty with literacy have been developed. A series of studies by Brown and her colleagues[4](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#4) suggests that reciprocal teaching is a productive approach to improving comprehension, particularly for those experiencing difficulty acquiring literacy. Brown argues that the success of reciprocal teaching is firmly grounded in dialogue and collaborative sense-making, but other features are also central. These have been incorporated into the design of her Fostering Communities of Learners project. According to Bruner's analysis of this project,[5](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#5) the central features of these classrooms are: agency, reflection, collaboration, and culture. These features are consistent with the instructional emphases listed above and again suggest that the principles of effective instruction are the same for both more and less competent literacy learners.

Other interventions across grade levels reflect some of these points, particularly the importance of joint construction or distributed authority. For example, Pressley's successful Transactional Strategies Instruction (TSI) program with second graders involved joint construction of meanings among teachers and students. CELA research,[6](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#6) particularly studies by Applebee, Langer, Johnston, and Nystrand,[7](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#7) points to distributed authority, as occurs in dialogic classrooms, as very productive for literacy development. However, there is also evidence that it is rare, and particularly rare for struggling learners.[8](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#8)

Student agency. Students at the lower end of classroom performance are distinguished by a set of characteristics that, although not universal, are common and consistent across schools. They read and write less than their higher performing peers, do not choose to read and write (even actively avoid doing so), are less metacognitively aware, less strategic, less persistent, less likely to connect learning to their own experience, less likely to generalize new learning, less likely to take control of their own learning, and more likely to construct and cling to simplistic interpretations.[9](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#9) In other words, they adopt a relatively passive stance to learning: they lack a sense of agency in literacy learning. Therefore, meeting the needs of struggling readers requires first and foremost the development of classroom environments that sustain inquiry and reflection, agency (with all it entails about identity and strategic action), and authentic collaborative action.

Without effective instruction, these students are likely to conclude that they can do nothing to change their performance, and they are likely to attend most strongly to their performance relative to others, attaching inappropriate trait-like significance to performance differences. The more classroom discourse emphasizes that ability is capacity, literacy is individual performance, and all knowledge is teacher delivered, the more likely it is that students will construct handicapping identities and learning strategies.[10](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#10)

Case[11](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#11) argues that central conceptual structures enable students to structure their learning productively. Too often, however, literacy instruction leaves struggling students with unproductive conceptual structures that draw their attention to non-central features. This results in a reduction of strategic action or directs action towards inappropriate goals and fragmented learning. For example, when students learn that literacy is monologic, non-social, primarily technical and hierarchical, and unrelated to their personal experiences,[12](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#12) they also are likely to find that learning to become literate feels effortful. And they evaluate that effort as negative. Wenger[13](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/struggling.htm#13) offers the analogy of two stone masons cutting blocks: One says that he is cutting a perfectly square block, the other says that he is building a cathedral. Wenger argues that even though they are apparently doing the same thing, the experience is very different, and the experiential difference has both short- and long-term consequences.

Specific strategies. As highlighted in the [accompanying boxed inset](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/strategies.htm), several strategies can be employed to help struggling readers increase volume, fluency, and comprehension. Structuring productive interventions requires viewing and responding to students and their literate practices in a variety of different ways, depending on the specific issues needing to be addressed. Overall, it is essential that teachers notice exactly what a child is doing well and reflect that back to her or him, along with constructive feedback as to what might be done to improve performance.

**Endnotes**

1        E.g., Oakes et al., 1992; Allington, 1983.

2        Dyson, 1993.

3        E.g., Clay, 1998

4        Brown, 1997; Palincsar & Brown, 1984.

5        1996.

6        E.g., Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995.

7        Applebee, 2000; Langer, 1995; Johnston, 1999; Nystrand, 1997.

8        Nystrand, 1997; Page, 1991

9        E.g., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Johnston & Winograd, 1985; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998.

10    Nicholls, 1989; Johnston et al., 1998.

11    1992.

12    Jones, 1991; Johnston & Nichols, 1995.

13    1998.

[References Cited](http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring01/references.htm)

**\*** This article has been adapted from [Helping Struggling Readers: *Proposal for a Program of Research and Development*](http://cela.albany.edu/research/partnerB6.htm), National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement, May 2000.

# From the The Six Ts of Effective Elementary Literacy Instruction

By: [Richard Allington](http://www.readingrockets.org/articles/by-author/62721)

##  Tasks

Another characteristic of these exemplary teacher classrooms was the greater use of longer assignments and reduced emphasis on filling the day with multiple, shorter tasks. In these classrooms, students often worked on a writing task for ten days or more. They read whole books, completed individual and small group research projects, and worked on tasks that integrated several content areas (reading, writing, and social studies).

The work these children in these classrooms completed was more substantive, more challenging, and required more self-regulation than the work that has been more commonly observed in elementary classrooms. We observed far less of the low-level worksheet-type tasks and a greater reliance on more complex tasks across the school day and across subject matter. Perhaps because of the nature of this work, students seemed more often engaged and less often off-task than other researchers reported.

Relatedly, the tasks assigned often involved choice – student choice. We described the instructional environment as one of "managed choice." Students did not have an unlimited range of task or topic choices, but it was less common to find every students doing the same task and more common to observe students working on similar but different tasks. For instance, in a fourth-grade unit on insects, each child caught and brought that insect to class. They then sketched the insect using magnifying glasses to discover detail. These sketches were then labeled for body parts (thorax, abdomen, antennae, etc.). Students also observed the insect in its natural environment and jotted field notes about observed behaviors and habits. They wrote a short description based on these notes and constructed a model of the insect from craft materials. Finally, they presented their insect to classmates and then posted their sketches, models, and descriptions on the classroom wall where classmates could review and study the insect projects.

Choice of this sort has been documented to lead to greater student ownership of the work and greater engagement with the work (Turner, 1995). A related characteristic is that such an array of student work makes it more difficult for students (and perhaps teachers) to rank student work from best to worst. Low-achieving students may have selected one of the more interesting insects to research and display. Peers see the new information on an interesting bug rather than seeing the same insect worksheet they just completed.

## Talk

Like the Teach component, classroom talk is under-researched. We saw fundamental differences in the nature of the classroom talk in the exemplary teacher classrooms and the talk typically reported in classroom observational studies. First, we observed these teachers fostering much more student talk – teacher-student, student-student – than has been previously reported. In other words, these exemplary teachers encouraged, modeled, and supported lots of talk across the school day. This talk was purposeful talk though, not simply chatter. This talk was problem-posing, problem-solving talk related to curricular topics (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Johnston, Woodisde-Jiron & Day, 2001).

It wasn't just more talk but a different sort of talk than is commonly heard in classrooms. We described this difference as "more conversational than interrogational." Much previous work has well-documented the interrogational nature of most classroom talk. Teachers pose questions, children respond, teacher verifies or corrects. That is the dominant pattern observed in study after study, grade after grade (Cazden, 1988; Nystrand, 1997).

The classroom talk we observed was more often of a conversational nature than an interrogational nature. In other words, teachers and students discussed ideas, concepts, hypotheses, strategies, and responses with others. The questions teachers posed were more "open" questions, where multiple responses would be appropriate. For instance, consider the difference between the three after-reading questions below:

1. So, where were the children going after all?
2. So, what other story have we read that had an ending like this one?
3. Has anyone had a problem with a pet like the boy in the story?

Responses to Q1 are strictly limited to a single "correct" response as dictated by the story content. But Q2 and Q3 offer the opportunity for multiple "correct" responses. In addition, while a response to Q1 leads only to a "Right" or "Wrong" teacher reply, Q2 and Q3 lead to follow-up teacher queries along the lines of, "Explain how the endings are similar" and "Tell us more about how your pet problem was like the problem in the story." While Q1 offers an assessment of appropriate strategy use, Q2 and Q3 offer the opportunity to examine the thinking – the strategy in use – and the opportunity for instruction. Q1 assesses recall; Q2 and Q3 assess a broader understanding and help make children's thinking visible.

The nature of classroom talk is complicated and too little understood. While there is evidence that more "thoughtful" classroom talk leads to improved reading comprehension (Fall, et al, 2000; Johnston et al, 2001; Nystrand, 1997), especially in high-poverty schools (Knapp, 1995), we still have few interventions available that focus on helping teachers develop the instructional expertise to create such classrooms and few of the packaged programs offer teachers any support along this line. True conversation cannot be scripted or packaged. The classroom talk we observed was highly personalized and focused on a targeted reply to student responses. Teacher expertise was the key, not a scripted, teacher-proof, instructional product.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/six-ts-effective-elementary-literacy-instruction>