Title of Your Paper

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**Introduction**

Conversations in a first grade classroom range from loose teeth to identifying text features in literature. Class discussions should be characterized by accountable talk, the contributions of insightful ideas, and purposeful facilitated learning. Disappointingly, this is not always the case. The purpose of this inquiry is to understand how I can promote classroom communication with various discussion strategies to enhance collaboration for comprehension in academic contexts.

**Background**

I am currently interning in a first grade classroom in a rural Tampa Bay elementary school. The elementary school contains varying socioeconomic statuses, mainly lower/middle, which is reflected through its Title I classification. The first grade classroom that this inquiry takes place consists of seventeen students, eleven are males and six are females. A majority of the students’ race/ethnicity is white (41%), followed by 30% Black Non-Hispanic, and the remaining Hispanic and Multiracial. One of the students has a hearing impairment and uses a cochlear implant, RFM device, and has an interpreter. Another student has a muscular impairment and requires a wheel chair when traveling long distances.

During my time in this classroom, I have observed discussions that not only lack student engagement but are also missing effective content area learning without authentic contexts. As a result, I have worked with peers, university representatives, collaborating teachers, and professionals in the education field in an endeavor to enhance student academic learning through dialogue. As an educator, I aspire to engage and challenge all students in cooperative learning experiences complimented by meaningful discussion. Discussion will enhance student participation and collaboration by allowing students to verbalize and collaborate with like-minded peers to reflect on their learning. Therefore, the purpose of this inquiry is to research and establish discussion techniques that advance student achievement and engage learners in the content of the lesson.

**Wondering**

With this purpose, I wondered what discussion strategies would effectively engage student to collaborate with peers.

**Literature Connections**

To learn more about my wondering I consulted the literature, which provided me with further insight into my inquiry. I learned the importance of establishing procedures and expectations. I also discovered additional discussion strategies.

Throughout the literature identified related to my inquiry, one of the major concepts that I took away from this research is to ensure that the students are comfortable and confident when participating in class discussion (Murie, 2004). In order to increase students comfort and confidence the educator should integrate humor, early success, reassurance, simplicity in tasks, and explicit directions. (Murie, 2004). Additionally, I was able to identify various discussion strategies to implement, which took a step beyond the “classic” discussion strategies including: Numbered Heads Together, Timed Pair Share, Rally Robin, and Quiz-Quiz-Trade ("Kagan Publishing & Professional Development"), Rallytable, Showdown (Dotson, 2001), Inside-Outside Circle, and Rally Coach (Murie, 2004). I believe this learning is important to my inquiry because I have a better understanding of the importance of student comfort in relation to their collaboration

**Methods/Procedures**

 To gain insight into my wondering, I consulted literature, established discussion strategies, and implemented various strategies within the classroom. The research revealed that many theorists suggested learning takes place most effectively when students have the opportunity to take leadership roles and assume ownership of their learning, and there are opportunities for social interactions (Certo, 2011). The research also revealed various discussion strategies that appear developmentally appropriate for the primary student. These discussion strategies include Inside-Outside Circle, Rally Coach (Murie, 2004), Think-Pair-Share, Rally table, Numbered Heads Together, and Showdown (Dotson, 2001). Once I decided on the strategies, I created a chart that tracked student involvement and accomplishment of the objective (which is a simple teacher made checklist), and a survey to track student opinion on the strategy (see Appendix A). Prior to implementing any discussion techniques, I collaborated with the students to establish class expectations while participating in discussion. An anchor chart was created that covered what discussion should it sound like, look like, and feel like. The general consensus includes: eyes on speaker, voices off, use loud speaker voice (or table talk), raise your hand if you have something to say, feel happy and excited, use accountable talk.

 Once these norms were established, it was time to start implementing different discussion techniques. The first was a student led discussion. During student led discussions, the teacher should only interject when required; students are solely responsible for their learning. Student led discussions were implemented once for fun and twice for academics. Share time was implemented in a manner that reflects student led discussion model. Later that week in English Language Arts, the student led discussion was implemented in the process of retelling and identifying the central message. Central message is a relatively new concept that some students struggled with.

Prior to implementing the student led discussion, 25% of students were able to identify the central message of the text and justify their answer in a journal response. This data was collected through journal responses that I collected and assessed (see Appendix B). After implementing the student led discussion 44% and later that week 75% of students were able to identify the central message, build on their peers ideas, and elaborate/justify their responses (see Appendix B). Both of these data points were collected through teacher anecdotal observations and checklist. The same scale was used (see Appendix B) when assessing the students’ verbal responses while identifying the central message. This data reveals that students benefit from having the opportunity to collaborate with peers.

Additional discussion strategies that were implemented include Rally Robin, Rally Coach, and Stand Up Hand Up Pair Up. These strategies were beneficial to students and the students were actively engaged in the content. The discussion strategies allowed students to work together to learn and become responsible for their own learning and their teammates through positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, and simultaneous interactions (Dotson, 2001). The student responses reveal their opinions related to the strategies (see Appendix C). The Rally Robin was introduced in a humorous manner, which translated into students feeling more comfortable and confident when participating (Murie, 2004).

 As I engaged in the inquiry process above, I collected data to answer my wondering by teacher observations and checklists. This revealed which students were active participants in the discussion technique and their ability to meet the objective of the lesson. Additionally, I created a survey to track student enjoyment of the strategy (see Appendix A). Once the students completed the survey, I collected and analyzed the data by tracking the number of students who loved, liked, thought it was okay, or hated the discussion strategy implemented. The data revealed that students took great pleasure in collaborating with their peers. The strategy ‘student led discussion’ was examined further in relation to student achievement and a chart was created (see Appendix B), which revealed that students’ comprehension and ability increased throughout the implementation of the discussion.

**Findings**

As a result of analyzing my data three important things that I learned include:

**Learning Statement 1:** Prior to implementing discussion, it is important for students to develop their own expectations and rules during discussion. This provided them with the opportunity to become active participants in their learning and increased students effective collaboration with peers.

This learning statement relates back to my wondering of which discussion strategies effectively engage students to collaborate with peers. Through the introduction of the concept of discussion in the classroom, students were responsible in creating their own expectations, which provided them the opportunity to take responsibility. This finding relates to the idea that learning takes place best when students take leadership roles and assume ownership (Certo, 2011). Additionally, throughout the various discussion techniques implemented, students reminded each other of the rules, requiring little intervention from the teacher. Through allowing students the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility in discussion they were able to become more active participants in collaboration. While conferencing with the Teacher Talent Developer, she expressed the importance of students being stakeholders in the discussion prior to implementation. Through students establishing the expectations, they were able to become stakeholders and further value the discussions taking place. The observations of students valuing the discussion expectations were observed throughout discussion implementation as students reminded their peers of expectations.

**Learning Statement 2:** The discussion strategy of student led discussions provided students with the opportunity to further develop their understanding.

Throughout the English Language Arts unit on identifying the central message of a text, the discussion strategy of student led discussion as implemented. Initially students were not given the opportunity to collaborate. They were required to individually write in their journals what they thought the central message was. This resulted in over half of the students not clearly identifying the central message. Only 25% of the students were able to successfully identify the central message and support their answers. Once the student led discussion strategy was implemented, well over half of the students were able to identify the central message and seven were able to clearly justify their reasoning. After the second implementation of student led discussion, 75% of the class was able to identify the central message and justify their reasoning (see Appendix B). This influx in ability to identify the central message relates to the implementation of student led discussion because through teacher observations, students were able to talk through and articulate their thought further then they would be able to do so in their journal.

**Learning Statement 3:** Students enjoy the opportunity to collaborate with peers and thrive when given the opportunity.

Through the student surveys and interviews, it is evident that students enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with peers (see Appendix C). Students were asked to complete a survey in which they revealed how they feel about the specific discussion strategy (love it, like it, it was okay, and did not like it). Once the surveys were collected, they were formatted into a chart that served as a visual representation of the students’ feelings (See Appendix C). The data revealed that the students loved the opportunity to collaborate with peers. My wondering relates to what discussion strategies will effectively engage students in collaborating with peers. This learning statement relates to my wondering because students are more likely to engage in something that they enjoy, therefore students are more likely to collaborate with peers because they enjoy doing so.

**Conclusion**

The inquiry process is beneficial to both the educator and the students. Throughout engaging in this inquiry process I learned details my students learning aptitude and attitude. I believe that this individual connection and insight in vital to properly educate each student. During this inquiry I implemented the discussion strategies in a fun and interactive manner at least once a week. This revealed a variety of personal information that allowed me to understand how to craft training techniques that maximized each students learning. Additionally, this approach compliments how first grade students discover insightful and meaningful pieces of information when given the opportunity. I also learned how perceptive and open my students are to different ideas. This inquiry provided them with the opportunity to collaborate with peers and explore different perspectives, thus broadening the learning experience.

My findings revealed that students learn more effectively when they have the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning. Leveraging this training technique, I was able to provide my students with the opportunity to collaborate and explore new ideas that enhanced their understanding of a given topic. For example, throughout the implementation of student led discussions and within the unit of identifying the central message, students improved tremendously. Initially, only 25% students were able to identify the central message and support their answer. However, by completion of our student led discussion exercise, this percent increased substantially.

By engaging in this inquiry I have learned a great deal about education techniques and how they can be leveraged to improve my personal teaching style. I have learned that there are so many opportunities for educators to encourage student collaboration. This extremely effective technique sometimes goes against an educators often belief that their students talk too much. However, implementation of these discussion strategies is extremely effective and allows educators to instill rules whereby students will be able to talk with guidelines on given topics.

My finding will positively influence my future teaching style and practice in various manners. My first learning statement relates to the importance of student contribution in establishing expectations. This is something that I plan to implement whenever possible. Providing students the opportunity to influence expectations increases the probability of following them and collaborating with peers. Additionally, I plan to implement a variety of discussion strategies when appropriate in the classroom. There are many strategies available that allow students to always be collaborating with different peers, providing them the opportunity to hear, learn, and understand new ideas.

References

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Appendix A



Appendix B

Key:

Excellent – Student was able to identify the central message and support their answer

Satisfactory: Student was able to identify the central message

Needs Improvement – Student was not able to identify the central message

Appendix C