

Improving Student Talk through Coaching

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Abstract

Common studies suggest we spend at least 80 percent of our waking hours in some form of communication throughout the day, with the majority of that being in conversation -- speaking and listening. In classrooms and schools, we find these measures almost to be inverted, where conversations yield to long, one-sided inputs from teacher and or other stimuli. Even as educators acknowledge the benefits of student discourse as it relates to social-emotional development, constructivist learning, and critical thinking, schools continue to struggle in adopting strategies that support more opportunities for quality student talk. This action research study explores the impact of targeted coaching on planning and implementation of student talk strategies introduced in site-wide professional learning engagements as a means to improve teacher planning and increase opportunities for student conversations. The results of this research suggests that with the addition of continuously responsive and focused coaching, teachers will experience improved cognition in planning and in this case, students dramatic shifts in opportunities to engage in structured discourse. The implications of this study can support leaders and coaches who are looking to maximize transfer of instructional practices introduced and studied in regularly ongoing professional development.

Context and Problem of Practice

Havensroot Middle School is a small public middle school located in East Oakland, California. Part of a larger historic site known as the Havenscourt Campus, Havensroot was born out of the small schools movement that permeated Oakland just over a decade ago. Serving grades 6-8, representing students from over 36 different countries and three primary languages

— English, Spanish, and Arabic, Havensroot is one of a handful of small schools making up part of the Oakland Middle School Network.

For years, Havensroot Middle School has struggled to maintain a stable learning environment for teachers and students. For its first seven years, the campus averaged more than 50% turnover of staff, including leadership and administration. In one five-year span, the site experienced five consecutive principal changes. This of course, significantly impacting everything from instructional progress to school climate and safety. Standardized test scores averaged 5% in math and 13% in ela, according to SBAC, and have been in marginal, yet slow decline for the past 3 years.

In 2013, Havensroot Middle School started to find some traction. A strong core of teachers decided to stay and grow. The school became a part of a federal school improvement grant (SIG), which provided over a million dollars every year for coaching, resources, and training. This would mark a significant change in teacher support and see Havensroot enter into its most stable years. In the two years following the expiration of SIG, Havensroot experienced less attrition, *including one year where it was the only middle school to own 100% retention*, achieved marks in culture and climate metrics including attendance and student satisfaction, witnessed a significant reduction in suspensions with over 50% within the course of a year, and academic growth in perhaps it's only named focus; reading.

Despite significant gains in reading proficiency, Havensroot continued to lack a strong instructional identity and focus. With so much emphasis historically placed on culture, climate, and stability, the site had failed to to ever define the terms of instruction. Teachers had great latitude in planning annual units and daily lesson plans, while others adhered to scripted

curriculum that was either at present, supported by the district, or conveniently pushed through the available textbooks and sets within the classroom. As a result, measurements and metrics around CST and SBAC data would annually paint the same image — students at Havensroot were significantly underperforming and many years behind grade level. Between 2015-2017, the school averaged 6% proficiency in Mathematics and 17% in English Language Arts.

Across classrooms, observational data and evaluation-feedback would support the absence of consistent teaching practice and coherence within curriculum design and implementation. Between 2013-2017, the ELA and Mathematics departments at Havensroot Middle School only experienced one year of curricular continuity. Teachers voiced that “we were trying to find our bearings with new curriculum — methodology, textbooks, etc., not to mention the basic fundamentals of teaching to begin with!” At the same time, the transition to Common Core would further add new dynamics to tasks adults understood would be at the center of more “Critical-Thinking” aligned classrooms, namely the shift to more complex-texts, non-fiction reading, and evidence-based reasoning. To address the demands of these seemingly large reorientations, districts including OUSD took to focus on essential strategies and approaches— namely collaborative learning and academic discourse.

Havensroot teachers initiated the very first technical steps to collaborative learning. Classroom seating arrangements began to shift from singular desks to group and table seating. In 2016-2017, 9-out-of-12 teachers opted for physical group arrangements. 3-out-of-12 began to build group roles into daily instruction. In a survey, 100% of teachers announced that they were comfortable and used a discussion protocol like “Think, Pair, Share” at least

once-per-week. 1 teacher instituted regular response-discourse cards to scaffold conversation and debate within groups.

Professional Learning

Professional learning from the site has varied throughout the years, in both content and format. Never has there been a cycle that lasted more than 6 weeks, and never has there been a named instructional focus with measurable outcomes and timed monitoring. In 2016, Professional Learning rotated through aligning to new state common core standards, trauma-informed practices, and analysis of student work as it connected to corrective instruction. The rationale over the years has also remained fairly consistent. As staff experience, skill, and capacity became more and more distinguished throughout the years, in addition to that of the site-leader, attempts to plan professional learning in much broader strokes became the norm over either focused or differentiated learning. Rather than build systems for each learner to grow and improve within his/her own proximal development, staff learning remained surface level and one-size-fits all.

With the pedagogical, philosophical, and now research-backed shifts towards more student-centered classrooms, the conversation around student talk returns to the forefront. Teachers cited at the beginning of the year that talk time in classrooms ought to be monopolized by kids if we expect cognitive loads to shift. Additionally, the common Havensroot teacher no longer envisions his/herself as the primary holder of information and knowledge. All being said, where growing values and vision suggest mindset readiness for more student-centered classrooms, the actualization of said practices across the site continue to paint a very different image. Teachers still don't know how to plan, introduce, and maintain the routines necessary for

rich student talk. When pressed by curriculum needs, pacing, differentiation, and classroom management, teachers acknowledge that the first thing they fall back on is what they know; controlling classrooms by simplifying who talks -- the teacher. The transition to seeing and experiencing this form of learning, for both adults and students, thereby remains elusive; during a series of beginning of year observational walkthroughs throughout the campus, not a single classroom listed any form of collaborative or explicit talk-based exercises on agendas or learning objectives. Only one teacher had noticeable anchor charts or posters to suggest that talk had been pre-considered or visited on a regular basis.

Though some classrooms had taken the earliest initial steps to prepare for more collaborative learning, (structured and clear roles and physical arrangements) student learning measured by reading, Math, and ELA scores, continued to decline. Though there may be instances where optically one could observe students talking to each other, deeper analysis would indicate that conversations were largely procedure or recall based, rather than rooted in deeper sense-making. This was further evidenced in observations where talk was largely based on random teacher initiated pause-and-pair-share practices, with little other data to support that these moves were intentional, pre-planned, or with intention to cultivate actual critical thinking.

The problem of practice is that teachers are not planning for and thereby supporting rigorous academic conversations in classrooms. In areas where *classroom management and culture and climate* become overemphasized, whether in professional coaching and or learning--time, space, and energy towards instructional development have become more and more limited. It's no surprise then that teachers have fewer tools to employ when it comes to instructional

strategies and practices, including the specific knowhow to cultivate a room full of on-task talkers.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I'll explore research on the current state of student talk and its role in developing critical thinking in classrooms. In addition, I'll explore methodology around coaching to strengthen the transfer of new learning from professional development so that it *sticks* with teachers and lives through stronger metacognition as well as execution. The combination of exploring both stems from an intention to identify the optimal instructional focus that can deepen learning while also examining the way that coaches can support authentic internalization of these practices to be used in daily planning and execution.

Defining Student Talk

“Take a look at a typical standards list and highlight the verbs that ask students to do something. You might see terms such as evaluate, distinguish, outline, summarize, analyze, and hypothesize. Most of these are actually thinking skills that are often best developed in conversation. Moreover, some of these skills need to be developed in conversation, and if we remove this avenue, we weaken students' chances for academic success” (Zweirs pg 184). Student talk as it's explored in this research can be defined as conversations that are intended to make meaning or that lead to new and or strengthened cognitive sense-making.

Conversation is actually fairly complex, and consists of 3 vital processes; “listening, talking, and negotiating meaning” (Krashen 1985; Swain 1995; Long 1981). Negotiating meaning, as defined by Professor of Language and Culture Ana M. Hernandez, means using nonverbal and verbal strategies to articulate, decode, expand, and edit ideas in meaning

throughout a conversation (Hernandez 2003). Nonetheless, the actual practice of discourse, involving but not limited to listening, paraphrasing, brainstorming, and communicating, are rarely taught in any explicit way at the secondary level. “Oral language is a cornerstone on which we build our literacy and learning throughout life. Unfortunately, oral language is rarely taught in depth after third grade. Lessons dominated by teacher talk tend to be the norm in many classrooms (Zwiers 2011; Corden 2001; Nystrand 1996). If students haven’t developed the discipline necessary to listen, formulate thoughts and opinions readily and in preparation to respond, than they are missing a key opportunity to engage with learning.

Note that academic conversations are not merely just transactions of information. Rather it is a shared processing of information as it relates to evidence, opinion, and new understanding. “‘Academic conversations develop students’ intellectual agility’ (Brookfield and Preskill 2005). “They learn to think in real time, to think on their feet. In conversation, students must be able to quickly process and respond to unanticipated comments, some of which might be very strong counterarguments. In conversations, students must continually compare their ideas to the ideas of others” (Zweirs pg.296).When dissected, the seemingly simple task of student talk can actually be broken down into a rather complex set of events. Ybarra et al. explain: “For example, a simple exchange of views between two people requires that they pay attention to each other, maintain in memory the topic of the conversation and respective contributions, adapt to each other’s perspective, infer each other’s beliefs and desires, assess the situational constraints acting on them at the time, and inhibit irrelevant or inappropriate behavior” (2008, 249). Ybarra illustrates the nuances of everyday conversation and academic conversation, further highlighting a

significant issue in prioritization across our schools and education system if we are not focusing our learning and attention to develop this skill in children.

Listening

“The average person spends 45-75% of their waking time listening rather than talking. Since we do listen more than we talk, it is important for our success as communicators to focus as much on the listening process as it does the verbal or nonverbal processes of communication” (Boyenga, Wacker and Hawkins 1995). It could thereby be argued that the first tenant to conversation, academic or not, is the quality of listening (Krashen 1985; Swain 1995; Long 1981). To distinguish between hearing and listening is to consider the difference between recognizing sound and processing those sounds to make meaning (Sherven and Sniechowski 2011). The latter involves concentration and a conscious effort to make sense of such inputs. Listening at its best involves even a mindset -- one of humility, skepticism, as well as openness; openness to change your mind, opinions and beliefs (Sherven and Sniechowski 2011). As collaborative educators and researchers Frank Sibberson and William Bass articulate, “listening assumes we are open to change (2016).” Nonetheless, like student talk itself, listening is very often an overlooked skill to be learned and practiced (Vandergrift & Goh 2012, Graham & Santos 2015). When it is taught, often the focus remains product based over process (Graham & Santos 2015). This means that when students are experiencing listening as a skill or habit, it’s often in the pursuit of memory or recall, and not on making new meaning or metacognition --researchers like Vandergrift suggest that for this reason, it actually becomes more difficult for students to acquire listening strategies later on (1999, p. 174). This is reaffirmed by other researchers, who go as far as cautioning against focusing on the “retrieval of information from

long-term memory rather than on the processing activities themselves” (Richards 1983, p. 171). Again, many scholars agree that if the listener is asked to recall information after the listening passage is over, the focus is on memory instead of comprehension -- this reinforcement over time diminishes our understanding and purpose in being a listener as communicator.

The need for explicit instruction in student talk and in particular, listening, is supported by many authors. “Researchers have been laying emphasis on the learning strategies utilized by effective learners and suggest to teachers that one of the first priorities in the designing of listening lessons should be to instruct students how to approach listening, how to handle information that is not completely comprehensible” (Bagheri, Karami, Mendelsohn, 1994, p. 134). Learning strategies are defined as actions adopted by different learners to help adapt to new contexts and conditions (Oxford, 1990). For example, some discrete elements of a listener's role might include “be[ing] quiet, look[ing] at the speaker, pay[ing] attention to the materials presented by the speaker, and avoid[ing] distracting” (Owca, Pawlak, & Pronobis, 2003). Additionally, “listeners can make comments, ask questions, and respond to questions” (Brent & Anderson, 1993; Owca et al., 2003). Along every component of student talk, researchers continually support the need for intentional design around the teaching of each particular skill.

Student Talk as Equity

Academic discourse in schools is part of the opportunity gap facing many students in poverty and who attend schools in low-income areas (Cotton 1989; Lingard, Hayes, and Mills 2003; Weber et al. 2008). Several studies have shown that teachers tend to give students from low-income backgrounds fewer opportunities to talk about content and engage in

critical-thinking activities than teachers of higher-socioeconomic students (Cotton 1989; Lingard, Hayes, and Mills 2003; Weber et al. 2008). Student talk could be a significant reason why the gap exists between socio-economic groupings. Nystrand et al. (2003) also found almost no effective dialogue in low-track eighth-and ninth-grade classes. These and other studies reflect the need for increased chances to talk and develop oral academic language in classrooms with diverse students. Students suffer thereby by sitting in classrooms where they won't get to practice the critical habits of listening, challenging, and articulating their thoughts and opinions through open talk. Perhaps the population who require rich conversation the most, English Language Learners, or ELLs, are the most impacted by the degree to which student talk is not happening in classrooms. As Graham & Santos suggested, the "development of oral abilities... is one of the most challenging and neglected aspects of second language learning" (Vandergrift & Goh 2012, Graham & Santos 2015). For students who need to both hear and engage in regular oral interactions using both formal and informal vocabulary and language functions, they are receiving the least. In one study, Arreaga-Mayer and Perdomo-Rivera (1996) found that ELLs spent only 4 percent of the school day engaged in school talk and 2 percent of the school day discussing focal content of the lesson. The lack of attention to student talk is not only negligent, it is harmful to supporting our most vulnerable citizens and students. Without clear access to engage in relevant, rigorous interactions, students who are already far behind in their language acquisition will only fall further.

Student Talk as Critical Thinking

At the core of student talk is the development of critical thinking. Current pedagogical frameworks of 'right and wrong responses' have done more to limit student opportunities to

expand and elaborate their thinking (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979). For years, researchers and educators have observed the frequent use of the initiate-respond-evaluate (IRE) pattern in teacher–student talk and its ineffectiveness. These exchanges are typically initiated with a display question for which there is a predetermined correct response (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979). The implications of this, as explored by other researchers, may be severe. Cummins extrapolates, “it has been argued...that the vision of our future society implied by the dominant transmission models of pedagogy is a society of compliant consumers who passively accept rather than critically analyze the forces that impinge on their lives” (1994, pg. 47). Academic conversations develop students’ intellectual agility (Roake et. al). “They learn to think in real time, to think on their feet. In conversation, students must be able to quickly process and respond to unanticipated comments, some of which might be very strong counterarguments. In conversations, students must continually compare their ideas to the ideas of other’s (Brookfield and Preskill 2005). As Regie Routman, author of *Conversations* highlights, “All learning involves conversation. The ongoing dialogue, internal and external, that occurs as we read write, listen, compose, observe, refine, interpret, and analyze is how we learn” (2000, xxxvi). The external dialogue (conversation with others) cultivates the internal dialogue,” in other words, thinking. Decades ago the work of Social Psychologist Lev Vygotsky helped establish that learning is social (1986). In academic conversations, “students have adequate opportunities to engage in sustained, elaborated talk and to pursue their own lines of inquiry through discourse” (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). Barnes and Todd (1995) researched the impact of talk in learning during a study conducted of high school students in the United Kingdom. Like Vygotsky, their study was rooted in the social nature of learning. “They concluded that at times students were

able to gain more from talking with their peers than with the teacher” (Brown 2006, Barnes and Todd). Nystrand (1997) also found that the use of authentic questions with open-ended possibilities of responses, promotes dialogic interaction and learning. Robin Alexander, author of *Towards Dialogic Talking*, re-emphasize; “Children ... need to talk, and to experience a rich diet of spoken language, in order to think and to learn. Reading, writing and number may be the acknowledged curriculum ‘basics’ but talk is arguably the true foundation of learning’ (2006, p. 5). Finally, it should be noted that the “major conclusions of the present research reveal that metacognitively-based listening strategies can support learners to be more conscious of their learning processes while negotiate different contexts of listening” (Bagheri and Karami 2014). In fact, this will better equip students for stronger mental ‘organizing, planning, assessing, and monitoring” of their learning (Zeng, 2012).

Professional Development and Transfer

Identifying an instructional focus like student talk and academic conversations for a teaching community can only be one part of a larger whole in seeing it then impact student achievement in classrooms. In order to develop and strengthen the necessary teacher skills required to lead the kind of dynamic classrooms that serve all students in talk, schools are then faced with how to make use of limited time to support such ongoing learning and execution. As reaffirmed by many researchers, we know that teacher professional development is one of the foremost ways to foster educational change (Borko 2004). The manner in which that professional learning happens, however, varies from institution to institution. At our particular school site, teachers have been exploring student talk and collaborative strategies and protocols as regular input throughout weekly professional engagements. Therefore, with heavy exposure to the

instructional focus on a frequent basis, we then move to identifying ways to increase and maximize transfer of this learning as it's realized in teacher internalization and practice. Professional development in and of itself is simply not enough to support sustainable and enduring practice. We must look to supplemental systems and interventions to deepen and drive-home new learning.

Transfer & Instructional Coaching

As studied and published in great detail by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, in order for teachers to best internalize professional learning, the relationship between professional development and coaching must be linked and coherent (pg.5). Their years of research would go on to suggest that Professional Development is most effective when it includes components that are based in the school and embedded in the job (Miller 1995). This implies that a teachers' internalization of professional development can be strengthened with the attention and focus provided by coaching. Supports for improved teaching and learning are also more effective when they are tailored to needs identified by teachers (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1995). Coaching thereby can provide the intimate one-to-one attention and focus that can help a teacher hone in on a particular problem of practice in order to then troubleshoot in a personal and tailored way.

Nonetheless, either Professional Development or Coaching in isolation will not yield the powerful effects of the two in conjunction. Coaching alone "can sustain professional learning and act as a bridge between school practice and broader district goals. However, for coaching to accomplish those ends, it must be explicitly linked to other professional development opportunities and broader components of systemic improvement such as small learning

communities or districtwide frameworks” (The Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2005). One study of isolated professional development concluded it was far less likely to change and improve teachers’ craft and positively impact student achievement (Knight & Cornett, 2009). This reaffirms the argument that in order to truly shift, change, and grow teacher practice in the classroom, schools need to focus on providing connected professional development in both wide and narrow formats, simultaneously.

Maximizing Transfer

Another benefit of coaching reveals itself through studies of learning longevity and internalization over time. One longitudinal study that took place in California in 1984 examined the relationship between the type of professional development and the teacher transfer rate of new practices (Bush, 1984). Bush discovered that when a workshop alone was provided, the transfer rate was 10%—with the addition of modeling and practice, it increased by approximately 5% — finally, when peer coaching was added to the professional development mix, the teacher transfer rate jumped from 16-19% to 95% (Bush, 1984). Once a strategy is taught in a whole-school professional development session, where clear instruction and calibration can take place within the learning community, learning can extend beyond the session through a sequence of coaching. This comprehensive support increases the likelihood of skill transference (Joyce & Showers, 2002). R. G. Baker would conduct a follow up on Showers’ research to further explore the extent of a teachers’ implementation of new skills. He found that those participants who experienced peer coaching were more like to continue to execute new techniques six months later than their colleagues who didn’t participate (1983). This transfer of

skills was clearly more embedded for those who received regular coaching, as it's observed in practice well beyond that of those who only received it in the traditional learning setting.

Instructional Coaching

Of the many methods that can impact teacher growth, implementation and sustainability, effective feedback through instructional coaching continues to be one of the foremost ways to ensure that learning sticks (Hattie & Timperley 2007). Though many forms and types of coaching make up the wide landscape of instructional leadership, the spirit of coaching has remained relatively similar-- for the coachee to internalize cognitive processes that will allow him or her to maximize learning given a variety of contexts and audiences (Costa & Garmston, 1994; Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egawa, 2006; Duessen & Buly, 2006; Duessen et al., 2007). Instructional coaches can be defined as those “who work collaboratively with teachers [and] empower them to incorporate research-based instructional methods into their classrooms” (Knight, 2006). For the purposes of this research, I will use a theoretical framework built around seven key components introduced by researcher Jim Knight (2006).

- o Equality: instructional coaches and teachers are equal partners
- o Choice: teachers should have choice regarding what and how they learn
- o Voice: professional learning should empower and respect the voices of teachers
- o Dialogue: professional learning should enable authentic dialogue
- o Reflection: reflection is an integral part of professional learning
- o Praxis: teachers should apply their learning to their real-life practice as they are learning
- o Reciprocity: instructional coaches should expect to get as much as they give

The process of coaching, built first on this philosophical framework, can be rather involved. In this particular methodology, the belief is that in order for teachers to grow as educators, they must be willing to reflect vulnerably, pinpoint areas of growth, and then take risks to try and apply learning in real contexts. On behalf of the coach, this requires a significant amount of attention to building relational trust and safety (pg 30). Though Knight offers a clear theoretical approach for the coach/coachee relationship in professional learning, a coach's effectiveness still lies in his or her ability to provide feedback in a way that can move teacher practice, mindset, and ultimately, student achievement. For example, in order to be most useful, many researchers believe feedback needs to be delivered both frequently and with as much immediacy as possible to maintain relevance and urgency (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). The following components, offered by the Education Support Services Team of New Brunswick, offers some succinct processes of an effective coaching practice as it relates to capturing data in order to inform feedback and reflection (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development).

Observation of instruction and learning (coach interacts in the classroom with the teacher and students)

o Initial class visits and a review of the class profile will inform the mutual goal setting between the teacher and coach. As trust builds, the visits become more strategic with specific goals for observations mutually determined by the educator with the instructional coach. Educators who are observed more frequently by their coach implement new instructional strategies more readily than non-coached peers (Matsumara, Sartoris, Bickel and Garnier, 2009).

Collaborative review of student data (teacher with coach) - ongoing throughout cycle

o Student data will highlight ongoing needs of students and instructional decisions to address these needs will be a mutual decision. Matsumara, Garnier and Resnick (2010) found a “significant and positive increase in student achievement” based on the frequency with which teachers review assessment data.

Co-planning

o Selecting evidence-based teaching strategies to address student and teacher needs will be the focus of thoughtful collaborative planning.

o Identifying target standards of instructional practice (e.g., curriculum outcomes, standards, exemplars, Look-fors, N.B.’s Inclusive Education Policy) will provide a framework for learning targets and goal setting.

Modeling (coach models instructional practice as the teacher observes)

o Part of building capacity is providing models of exemplary practice within the context of the teacher’s classroom. Skillfully modeling effective student engagement and instructional practice is a critical responsibility of the coach.

Co-teaching

o To continue to enhance instructional practice, the coach and teacher engage in a co-teaching experience where the above stages inform the role each plays as shared learning facilitators in the classroom.

Collaborative reflection and planning for next steps

o As part of the process of ongoing data collection and review, the teacher and coach are determining growth in the teacher’s practice, student learning and recognizing ongoing areas of

need. An action research question may be co-created to investigate a research-informed solution to remaining learning needs.

Planning for gradual release of responsibility

o As the teacher's confidence grows and enhanced practices become embedded, the coach gradually withdraws individual services. A planned follow up with the teacher may be determined to discuss retention of new practices and successes.

A recurring and cautionary point of emphasis across the literature —feedback and coaching when done wrong can do more to diminish performance rather than promote learning (Saaris 2016). Growth mindset guru Carol Dweck adds, so does “a grade, check mark or simple evaluation” (Dweck et al., 2014). If teachers are simply provided the goal and the student's results in relation to the benchmark, it would only be as helpful as identifying or pointing out the gap; “the learner does not know how to use the feedback to improve” (Wiliam, 2011). Feedback that incorporates a way for the learner to improve helps increase the chances of mastery in the particular objective (Black & Wiliam, 2010; Clarke, 2005). It's for this reason that a model which incorporates opportunities to directly address gaps revealed by data (through practices like co-planning, co-teaching, modeling) is critical to the improvement and transfer process.

Conclusions

Coaching, observation, and feedback are crucial elements necessary in pushing Professional Development content and practice forward. Effective coaching itself is built from foundations of relational trust and partnership that operate collaboratively. The coaching model then needs to be structured around clear measurable goals, reflection, opportunities to explore strategies and tools, and finally space to practice. If these cycles are fulfilled with timeliness and

diligence to data and practice, the likelihood of teacher internalization and implementation drastically improves. As a compliment to Professional Development, whether staff-wide or in small group professional communities, coaching is a driver that will maximize learning that teachers receive either as one-offs or part of a cohesive unit. It allows individuals to get specifically curated support for specific areas of challenge.

Intervention Plan

I will engage in an 7 week cycle of coaching observation feedback with a team of 3 teachers, 6th through 8th Grade whose experience would range between 4 and 0 years. This will include a review of lesson plans, observation of lesson plan execution, and a post/debrief of lesson plan execution. One of the primary purposes of these cycles will be to focus on how learning in PD is reflected in and internalized in classroom spaces and how that is improved through 1-1 coaching. Some questions of focus will include: *Are teachers using what is discussed and or discerned during PD in their planning of lessons? To what degree of frequency or quality are teachers executing speaking and listening opportunities? Can teachers connect student talk practices to deepening learning?* Data will be collected from classroom observations, a student-talk rubric, pre and post surveys of teacher thinking, and personal journals and notes collected around coaching.

COACHING INTERVENTION PLAN					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does T’ planning of talk structures and strategies change with coaching? • How does T’ execution of talk structures and strategies change with coaching? • How does teacher planning and execution improve as a result of coaching? • What is the impact of professional learning on teacher planning and execution? • How do teachers perceive the relationship between student talk and critical thinking? 					
Component	Activities	Purpose/Sub-Question to be answered	Data to be Collected	Type of Data	Timeline

				(process v. impact)	
Teacher takes pre-survey					
Review of lesson plans using rubric	Evaluate across Teacher facing rubric and provide feedback relative to goal.	How many opportunities for student talk are in the LP? What kinds of talk?	Lesson plan rubric data	impact	March 1 - Tong, March 2 - Diana, Bruce
Baseline observation of classrooms using SF rubric	Evaluate across student facing rubric using and provide feedback relative to goal.	Are T' incorporating any talk structures or strategies? Whats the ratio of T/S talk? What's the connection between student output and teacher planning? Have they planned for any necessary scaffolding? What's the quality of student talk? Rubric	student talk rubric data	impact	March 1 - Tong, March 2 - Diana, Bruce
Baseline observation of teacher executing lesson plans	Observation walkthroughs	Are teachers executing what they have planned? What are the major gaps in implementation of planned student talk?	teacher execution of student talk during lesson	impact	March 1 - Tong, March 2 - Diana, Bruce
PD happens					
After PD Review and	Evaluate LP across Teacher	How does T define academic	Lesson plan rubric data	impact	March 1 - Tong,

<p>coaching of upcoming lesson plans using rubric</p>	<p>facing rubric and provide feedback relative to goal.</p>	<p>conversation? (pre-survey)</p> <p>TSvSS (Teacher to Student vs. Student to Student)</p> <p>Is learning from PD showing up in LP?</p> <p>PDL (PD Learning)</p> <p>What opportunities for student talk are in the LP?</p> <p>PST (planning student talk)</p> <p>What opportunities does the T see for AC?</p> <p>PST</p>			<p>March 2 - Diana, Bruce</p>
<p>observation of classrooms using SF rubric</p>	<p>Evaluate across student facing rubric using and provide feedback relative to goal.</p>	<p>Are T' implementing current strategies planned from PD?</p> <p>What are trends across 4 classroom observations?</p> <p>What's the connection between student output and teacher planning?</p>	<p>Coaching/Interview and debrief notes</p>	<p>impact</p>	<p>March 1 - Tong,</p> <p>March 2 - Diana, Bruce</p>
<p>Debrief of teacher executing lesson plans</p>	<p>Observation walkthroughs</p>	<p>Are teachers executing what they have planned? (EST executing student talk)</p>	<p>Coaching/Interview and debrief notes</p>	<p>impact</p>	<p>March 1 - Tong,</p> <p>March 2 - Diana,</p>

		<p>What are the major challenges in implementation of planned student talk? (LPTC Challenges)</p> <p>WHAT DO I WANT TEACHERS TO PAY ATTENTION TO?</p> <p>How do you see your lp reflecting things in pd? (PDL)</p> <p>What's the quality? (QST Quality student talk)</p> <p>how are people seeing themselves in relation to authentic conversation? (QST)</p> <p>how do teachers see student talk related to student learning? cognitive load, etc. (CT Critical thinking)</p> <p>given obs notes, can teachers see who's taking up more space? equity lens - who's talking or not?</p>			Bruce
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		continuum of questions. are t' seeing the relationship between quality of plan and quality of student engagement? (PST QST)			
Post Survey					

Research Methods

To get a better understanding of teacher thinking around student talk and planning for student talk, we began with a pre-survey to explore mindsets and garner early information about the degree and frequency to which teachers were planning. Though the inquiry and intervention is focused on the question, *“How does Teacher planning of talk structures and strategies change with coaching?,”* an underlying inquiry has also been, *“How do teachers perceive the relationship between student talk and critical thinking?”* As Jim Knight suggests in his components of coaching, specifically ‘choice,’ those who have agency in selecting areas of focus are much more likely to execute and execute to fidelity. I might make the assertion, therefore, that if choices are based on our knowledge, understanding, and reasoning of a certain priority-- that a teachers understanding of said relationship between talk and critical thinking ultimately

impacts his or her likelihood to prioritize it and give it focus in his/her planning. This survey would identify initial:

1) Beliefs around student talk and its connection to learning and

2) How this practice was showing up currently in teacher consideration and planning

Following the survey, all teachers participated in a co-observation of a peer using an in-house developed student talk continuum rubric; a fluid tool constructed and modified by our own Instructional Leadership Team that outlines student talk practices and teacher moves as they demonstrated emerging through thriving practices. The purpose of the co-observation was not intended to be evaluative of one another but rather as a prompt to self-reflect on a the evaluators own practice in her/his classroom. Following up on the co-observation, each teacher was charged with reflecting on how he/she saw their own classroom planning and practices revealed in the rubric, followed by a goal they wanted to achieve in the next 6 week cycle. This goal was taken from an ‘observable teacher practices’ column that is intended to give discrete techniques facilitators of high functioning student talk employ to get the richest discourse out of their students. This would become the backbone of coaching sessions, which would begin to take new form as the coaching relationship and style evolved to meet the needs of the coachee.

With every coaching session founded in a clear and concrete goal, teachers now had direction for their planning. As a partnership, we determined what ‘style of learning’ each teacher was naturally drawn towards. Bruce preferred the model approach, where I would perform a think-aloud planning session, teach a single period of the plan for his observation, and where he would teach the second lesson as I watched. Diana preferred the co-planning model, where we would develop ideas and research strategies together, and where she would execute

them the following week or day. Finally, Clark had preference to try it all on his own, taking a leap to both plan and execute and ask only for my observation in the classroom to see a final product and to then give feedback after-the-fact. Clark actually requested that rather than do any co-planning together, that he try to implement a talk strategy entirely on his own to get a baseline idea of where students were performing. All teachers would then debrief with me afterwards to pull out ‘glows’ and ‘grows’ from the observed talk portion and then modify, adapt, and plan for the next iteration. This method of ‘choice’ but also of ‘voice’ and ‘equality’ was reflected in the coaching stance as the primary driver remained the teacher in his/her preference for learning and practicing.

Coaching sessions would occur weekly for the seven weeks as teachers wrestled with new strategies for planning and student talk. Questions to prompt teacher cognition around the planning process followed a similar format of:

- “What is your intended outcome of this lesson?”
- “How will student talk help strengthen an understanding of the intended objective, concept, or complexity?”
- “What would you need to hear students say to convince you that they understood the concept/practice/etc?”
- “Could students reach that conclusion or show mastery without talking at all? Is this a student-talk worthy task?”
- How will you plan for this protocol or part of the lesson?

Coaching sessions were captured in coaching logs for each teacher as well as next steps for our practice. These were followed up with 10-20 minute classroom observations

pre-scheduled with each teacher to observe for implementation. These would also be captured in the coaching logs.

Following observations would be debriefs of the student talk practice, where teachers would reflect on strengths and areas of growth of both the planning and execution of teacher practices and student output in the classroom.

- “What did you notice about student engagement in the classroom?”
- “What about the plan supported student talk?”
- “What could have been improved about our planning to account for gaps in student talk?”

As closure for one teacher observation happened, so too did the beginning of our next iteration. As teachers identified patterns and practices that they would like to continue or strengthen, we would capture that in the notes to follow up on with our next planning session.

Finally, all teachers closed out with an end-of year survey that paralleled the pre-intervention survey as well as a new reflection of self on the student talk rubric.

Data Analysis

To begin an analysis of the various data sets, I first looked at quantitative means to determine the frequency of student talk opportunities that were actually being offered across classrooms. This was completed twice as a baseline -- once with an instructional coach as an observation/walkthrough and then again as part of the coaching cycle with each coachee Teacher. Using our own school-developed rubric, this would be the method used in every classroom observation with the hopes of seeing growth in opportunities presented as well as quality to the protocols that were executed. In addition to the observations in classrooms, I would also compare this with the pre and post-survey taken by teachers, in which they were to

self-identify in their classrooms and planning what frequency of talk opportunities were regularly provided to students on a daily basis. This would allow me to begin to surface any patterns and connections between what teachers were saying they were planning and what was in reality, happening and observed in classrooms.

Finally, in addition to the numeric measure and count of student talk opportunities, teachers also had an opportunity to select an observable teaching practice and set a goal along the rubric that they would like to achieve. This would allow us to reflect on growth throughout each coaching session and for me to see if that was in fact, occurring given the intervention of our coaching.

Using my research questions to drive the data capture and analysis of shifting mindsets and cognition, I knew that I would also have to code and review the impacts of coaching and coaching conversations qualitatively. For this reason, I recorded and transcribed each conversation to then code across key components that I believed demonstrated thinking and movement along certain critical ideas related to my inquiry.

PST (planning student talk)	(EST executing student talk)	(LPTC Challenges)	(QST Quality student talk)	(CT Critical thinking)
PST: There was an order of operations. I definitely want to try it. At least in	EST: Having a dynamic where a group shares something that other groups might not know...it'd be nice to have groups cross-pollinate and share ideas. You can read something different and share something different.			CT: How much of it is their own ideas, how much of it is just copying? How much is breaking it down and

Excerpt of the coding method used to analyze teacher thinking during coaching conversations.

As I reviewed coaching conversations across these individual components and also over time, I hoped to see shifts in how teachers reflected on their planning and execution, with

particular attention to how and if this would yield different and improved results in the next iteration of their lesson cycle and observation. Other indicators of change would be whether or not teachers discussed and articulated a connection between an intended strategy to the intended learning objective or simply whether their reflection and then planning would be corroborated with the frequency of talk opportunities as measured in the quantitative analyses. Seeing shifts in how teachers talked and reflected on their learning, reasoning, and planning, when it would align with my observations and evaluations across our rubric, worked to convince me that we together had an accurate perception of how impactful the intervention of coaching was on the habits of the teacher and the learning experiences of students. Ultimately, this triangulation of our various sources -- from coaching conversations, pre-and-post surveys, and observation and rubric data would suggest just that.

Intervention Impact Findings

Teacher Cognition and planning benefits from focused coaching, probing, and prompting

Despite teacher reported confidence around implementing student talk structures and protocols, what was clearly evident through observation, review of lesson plans, and initial coaching conversations prior to the intervention was that it simply wasn't happening, or being planned for in any intentional way with rigor in mind. Additionally, it wasn't being planned with the understanding that talk is actually a form of fortifying critical thinking as the literature suggests, not just a measure for output, engagement, or check for understanding. The impact of this practice within the intervention was the improved cognition of the teacher over time, wherein 2 of 3 teachers in 3 of the last 4 sessions were able to cite their objectives and goals in relation to a talk strategy they were trying to employ before ever being prompted by coach. The relationship

of teacher understanding therefore, which was once limited by a preconceived idea that student talk is but another strategy to liven up a classroom or simply get kids talking to each other more often, was shifting. As one teacher stated before the intervention, “I believe that having good discussions gives our students opportunities to share what they've learned and reflect on what they have yet to master.” During coaching session 5, this same teacher would later acknowledge, “this particular talk strategy will benefit my student understanding because of its particular attention to language.” This discernment and readiness not only to employ a strategy, but to understand *why* it supported access and mastery of an objective was a direct result of coaching conversations and in particular, *co-planning and modeling*, that would allow for this level of independent internalization and actualization in practice. The impact was not only that teachers were planning for more talk, but planning for more *quality, aligned* talk. Through coaching, teachers were applying the idea that talk, at it’s best, strengthens understanding [and] evokes new perspectives (Ybarra 2008). We began to address this in coaching conversations by narrowing in on objectives and outcomes. Even though the intended outcome of each coaching session was to preview a student talk strategy or structure, it was always coupled first with an understanding of where the learning was intended to go and then to ask, “*How will student talk help strengthen an understanding of the intended objective, concept, or complexity?*” Coaching notes will reveal that this was often the most perplexing and helpful prompt to ask teachers before engaging in actual planning. Teachers would have to think carefully about where they were going and ensure that whatever practice, whether it be talk or not, was directly linked to achieving that end. This narrowing of the coaching conversation, much like setting a goal, allowed the teacher to find much more clarity in why he/she would use such methods, as well as ensure that the prompt,

substance, and strategy were directly connected to the intended learning of the student. This demonstrated the internalization of a most central and important skill to lesson planning -- one's ability to connect teacher moves to stated targets, outcomes, and objectives.

DID THE TEACHER NEED TO BE PROMPTED? *"How will student talk help strengthen an understanding of the intended objective, concept, or complexity?"*

X= YES

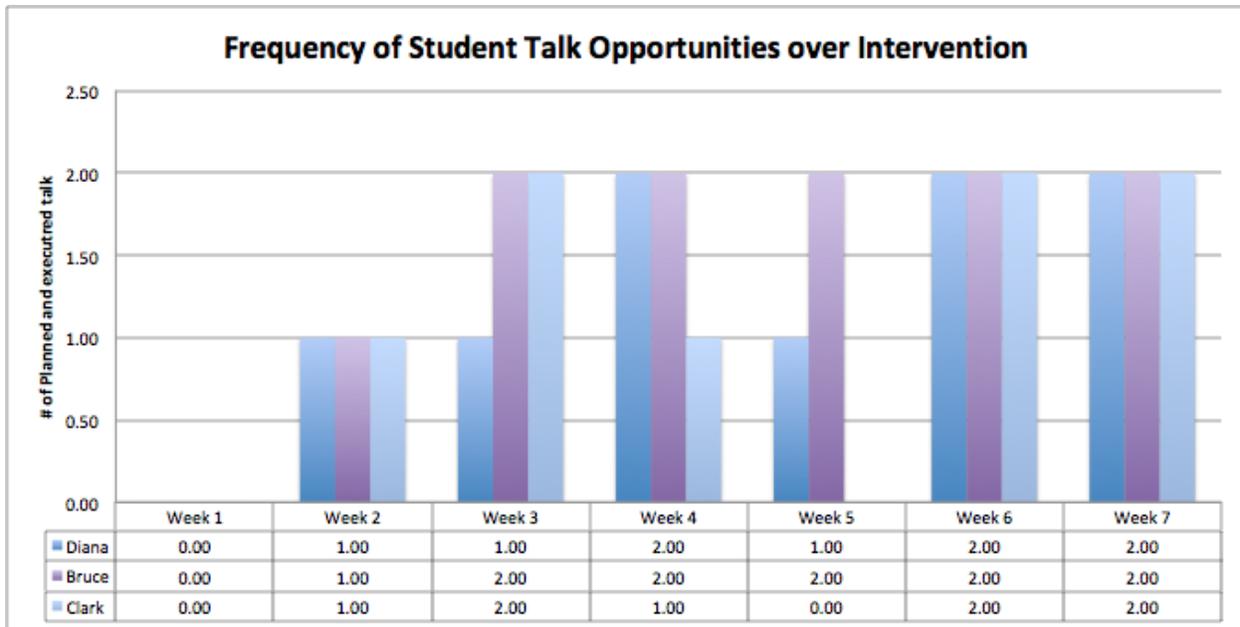
O = NO, TEACHER MADE AND ARTICULATED THE CONNECTION

	1st Session	2nd Session	3rd Session	4th Session	5th Session	6th Session	7th Session
Diana	x	x	O	O	x	O	O
Bruce	x	x	x	O	O	O	O
Clark	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Teacher planning AND execution of student talk strategies improves through coaching

In addition to providing focus, the coaching relationship as it continues over time with teachers yields improved results and quality in student outcomes. The support in holding space for teachers to reflect, plan and practice in real time, and also cultivate mutual accountability leads to a much more disciplined ability to refine practice towards analyzing and improving technique to reach better results which in this case, was illustrated in strengthened frequency and quality of student talk structures and protocols. Coaching observations would reveal that the frequency of student talk grew in the five weeks that the intervention took place, and though self-survey results from pre and post intervention remained the same as reported by teacher, observations from coaching logs reveal that the latter is a more apt diagnosis of where teachers really stand in

terms of planning for student conversations. In the pre-survey, teacher reflections that claimed they were planning 1-2 talk opportunities per lesson could not be corroborated by coaching observations, however, during the time of the post-survey, coaching observations and teacher reflection would be much more aligned. In addition, teachers would cite that the iterative process of coaching played a major role in improving understanding of student talk practices, as well as in execution. Diana states, “there were some patterns I noticed regardless of what talk strategy we were trying, like how to set it up in my classroom so students would be able to do it successfully...modeling, role playing, praising the first group,” all contributed to stronger execution with every new procedure that was integrated. Bruce would add “I like how we discussed the process as a series of failures. I knew that going into it the first time that we would be doing it again and so I tried to pay particular attention to areas that I would do differently the next time.” This model of coaching where we remained focused on our stated goals for content but also on the nature of improving execution of planning supported teachers in internalizing sound reflective mindsets as well as keen observational skills into their own moves and techniques. Over time, this would lead to stronger student outcomes, both in opportunities to talk but also in quality of conversations, as revealed in the post self-evaluation teachers completed on the talk rubric.



Process Findings

Teachers need agency in how they consume and internalize information

Sticking to Knight’s theory of teacher choice as it impacts adult learning, this would be reaffirmed through a process where each teacher was provided an opportunity to articulate the way in which s/he best takes on new learning and feedback. Given that each teacher had differing years of experience, personal temperaments and learning styles, as well as named assets and areas of growth, options were provided from the early stages regarding how the collaboration process would unfold between coach and coachee. Each teacher was given choice around modeling, co-teaching, co-planning, and autonomy (with debrief, although all would come with debrief) around incorporating new talk strategies in the classroom. Although each teacher selected a different model, each would speak to how the intended practice benefited their internalization. In fact, each coachee would find that along the intervention, they would move through different modes depending on how confident they were in planning and executing

certain protocols. For example, when Bruce first began, he opted for modeling because “I’m a visual learner and I wanted to see how you said certain things or set certain pieces up.” In his debrief, we recounted some of the specific moves and even verbiage used to communicate to students. Bruce noticed himself reciting it in his later classes. Nonetheless, when it came to discussing the next iteration, Bruce was ready for co-planning feeling confident that he could execute independently now that he knew specific techniques and skills to employ throughout the demonstration.

This use of choice had several positive impacts on this process.

- 1) It cultivated engagement on behalf of the coachee - Teachers were enthused by the opportunity to receive new skills in their preferred method and found accountability to their choice.
- 2) It built trust - Saying that our relationship is collaborative is one thing, but to provide choice and to commit to them in partnership proved that we both would be engaged in learning. In addition, the choice of modeling meant that coach would be vulnerable and offer up self as a learning exemplar/non-exemplar.
- 3) It built confidence - As teachers explored each model, from most intrusive (model teach) to least (autonomy), what is also revealed is increased confidence to execute both planning and practice independently.
- 4) It built reflection - Teachers would need to consider their learning styles, needs, and skills cultivated throughout the process that would then enable them to move towards more or less restrictive modes of learning.

In one case, a teacher learned after choosing the autonomous route that he in fact, needed much more scaffolding from the coach in order to deeply understand the complexity of planning and execution of student talk and in particular, student debate. He stated “I’m glad I got to see myself and my students do it on their own, but I know now there’s a lot more that has to go into it before they will be ready to have the discussion I know they’re capable of.” This illustrated a teacher reflection that both accepted what he had learned from his choice and also what gap was revealed as a result. This level of internalization is strengthened because it is born out of his own inquiry and perception, rather than one that was prescribed.

There are prerequisites to planning and executing student talk structures - or rather, there is a loose sequence of foundational practices teachers must master before moving forward toward more complex techniques.

One challenge that presented itself over the course of the intervention and would become an outlier was an improper focus of teacher practice given the absence of certain fundamental structures and techniques that might be considered prerequisites to this new skill. In other words, *supporting student talk routines* may be considered a sequenced skill that would follow other basic teaching practices, like building and maintaining basic classroom routines. In one particular coaching relationship with Clark, classroom observation notes reveal difficulty reflecting on and planning for explicit student talk practices. As this is further unpacked during a coaching conversation, the teacher notes “I realize in talking with you [coach] that I really don’t have any formal training outside of being a student myself. I haven’t been taught any teacher tricks so sometimes when you use certain language, it’s new to me.” What Clark is referring to as ‘teacher tricks’ are actually sound teaching and management principles that anyone who has received his

or her credential has surely been exposed to; backwards planning, learning objectives, attention getters, etc. Clark, who possesses an emergency credential and no prior experience in an educational program, had no concrete schema to unit design or regarding classroom management tools. This we discovered, would be a major hindrance to his ability to capture nuances to planning new practices such as collaborative protocols, as he would find himself in similar challenges in front of students that existed even before the onset of this new intervention. Observation notes of the class illustrate difficulties primarily rooted in classroom management, from “*students talking over teacher,*” to “*students interrupting peers using abusive and harmful language.*” In debriefs following such observations, conversations about student talk would be usurped by focusing on elemental structures of teaching -- setting up systems and routines, communicating clear expectations, all the way to unpacking mindsets around safety and the role of consistent consequences for behavior. When this was all said and done, much of the coaching model, planning, and action orientation was now invested in basic structuring your class and planning 101, without much emphasis on the explicit focus on student talk. This of course, revealed itself in the classroom as the teacher began exerting much more attention and priority to these initial practices over that as relatively advanced as student talk protocols. This surprised me as even though I knew as a first year teacher, classroom management would certainly exist as a barrier to execution, I underestimated how integral fortifying key classroom practices would be to the potential and possibility of introducing new structures and systems.

Implications

The role that intentional and targeted coaching plays in the continued growth and development of educators cannot be understated. Given the multitude of needs by both student and teacher and

the idea presented by researcher *John Hattie* that *'everything works'* in improving student achievement, school leaders need to be disciplined in identifying what actually works *best* if s/he is to maximize results in the classroom (Hattie pg. 15) . What this action research revealed was the power of a coach in providing focus and coherence for a teacher, and in being the embodiment of a growing consciousness as it then leads into practice. At best, a coach models thinking that coachees then internalize, adding it to a toolkit of cognitive processes that go on to build innovative and powerful lessons that work to challenge students in growing in the most meaningful ways. In this particular study, student talk happened to be the medicine, whereas the coaching focused on the teachers craft of diagnosing and delivering said solution. In this analogy, it became incredibly important for coach to understand his coachee, establish the best conditions for learning, and then provide the right form of feedback for the coachee to process, apply, and execute. For leaders and instructional coaches who are trying to impact, change, and improve teacher practice, it is vitally important to consider the relationship between ongoing adaptability and the often necessary support in maintaining focus. This begins, not unlike the classroom space, with deeply knowing and investing your learner, followed by providing a responsive level of support that's tailored to style and preference. In addition, it's upon the coach to also recognize gaps in understanding when coachees themselves don't see them, and prepare to fill those in incrementally by building the reflective habits in coachees to discern them on their own. The journey to learning and shifting practice therefore, is not a sprint, but a well planned and well disciplined training regiment *preparing* for the marathon career that is teaching.

Limitations

This action research project explored the impact of instructional coaching and professional learning of a team of educators over approximately one marking period, or six weeks. Despite encouraging findings in coaching and even in advancing student talk in the classroom, it should be acknowledged that this study was completed in a context that included a wide array of additional variables that would make it challenging to replicate. To begin, when one half of a coaching relationship consists of the Principal, the impact of role authority, status, and power must be considered as an influencer on its own. Though the principles of coaching were applied to engage and invest teachers in the most authentic way, not enough data was collected to discern whether teachers shifted or changed as a result of the coaching methodology or because their supervisor requested this of them. Next, the number of participants was small and individually selected, so to extrapolate that this could be scaled out proportionately should be cautioned. Both the temperament and experience of teacher and coach are components that will vary throughout school sites and throughout school years. Though the concepts and framework of the intervention might very well assist leaders and coaches in designing approaches to move student achievement in the classroom, it should not be generalized that it will produce exact results. Finally, without a control group or comparison, we cannot confirm that this intervention yields more or greater results than no intervention at all. What we can say, however, is that every adult who experienced this intervention also experienced growth in planning ability as well as growth in speaking opportunities and output from students.

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