Four Strategies to Reduce Teacher Talk in the Classroom

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Superintendent Insight: Teacher Talk

As a teacher, I valued the importance of the students having a voice in my class. Often, it’s tricky trying to decipher the perfect balance of teacher talk and yielding the floor to the students. As an administrator, my thoughts are no different. We still talk too much. A lot of us come to school, voices ready to spout facts, redirect opinions, etc. We do these things with the best of intentions; however valuable learning opportunities get lost in the midst of excessive teacher talk.

It is with that notion I offer four practical alternatives to help reduce teacher talk in the classroom.

1. The turn and talk. The teacher gives students an idea and then a chance to share their opinion on the concept to their selected peers. Teachers can have students share out on their partner's thoughts, to ensure students are actively engaged on the task. Turn and talks work best when the strategy is set up for the students. If you are in a co-teaching environment, the perfect segue to introduce a turn and talk would be to model the expectations with your co-teacher. Students get into this strategy as it allows them to learn and interact with their peers.

2. The flipped classroom. This generation of students is resourceful and tech savvy. If they have the opportunity to learn things beforehand, many if not most will take the opportunity to participate in pre-learning about a subject. Pre-learning gives the teacher a chance to ask guiding questions, set-up pre-made differentiated groups to maximize student output. Having students learn about issues before coming to school cuts down on lecture time, and allows teachers the much-needed space to facilitate.

3. Student Modeling and Share-outs. In Math classes especially, all teachers give their students a practice set. When it comes time to review the practice set, allow the students to present their work. It’s a two-pronged approach, 1) Kids learn better from each other. Other students will give their undivided attention to the student presenter. 2) It allows you as the teacher to talk to your students about the simple mistakes that they make day-to-day, and it will enable you to capitalize on how your students approach
solving problems. If done correctly, not only are you speaking less, you're more useful to your students as a facilitator of their learning.

4. Think-Pair-Share. Initially, students focus on a question, and even if they struggle with it, it is okay. Students then pair with their peers and discuss their answers together. The students can pick each other's brains to determine how he/she arrived at their conclusion. After a lengthy discussion, students then share out their findings to the rest of the class.

Teachers can get through the same content while talking less. The more you speak during lessons, the faster it is for students to check out. One of the more common mistakes made by teachers is the thought that you can talk yourself through or out of a lousy lesson. When it comes to the teacher talk, less is best.