From Simple to Complex, Student Talk is Key to Improving Reading Comprehension

ARTICLE

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WHAT DID THEY DO?

Connor and colleagues were interested in the relationship between student talk in literacy lessons and Reading Comprehension (RC) gains. The researchers coded video recorded lessons from 12 2nd-3rd grade classrooms over the course of a school year. Their aim was to code types of teacher and student talk in the classroom.

The types of teacher talk ranged from asking questions that require non-verbal responses to challenging students to reason or make an inference about the text. The types of student talk ranged from non-verbal responses to using text to justify a response.The simpler types of talk were often choral responses. Three kinds of standardized reading assessments were given in the fall and spring of the same school year.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

More talk was generally associated with stronger RC gains. A range of types of student talk were beneficial– non-verbal choral responses contributed to RC gains as well as higher order discourse, such as using text evidence to support a claim. On the other hand, no one kind of teacher talk predicted better reading comprehension outcomes. Instead, teacher talk that promoted any and all kinds of student talk demonstrated some of the highest gains. Some of these teacher talk moves included whole-class nonverbal responses, choral responses, asking simple questions, and choral reading of text.

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

Connor and colleagues' research suggests that teachers can strategically involve the whole class to improve engagement with comprehension of texts. They suggest that teachers can assess their own lessons through video recording and note how many times their prompts activate whole-group student talk. Teachers can fill their lessons with a range of opportunities to respond, from simple to complex. The researchers suggest practices such as turn and talk, and think, pair, share. What's important is that all students are talking about their thinking and what they are reading, either sharing with each other or to the teacher.