Turn and Talk
Procedures and Routines

PLAN

Language is a child's most powerful learning tool. Language is a child's most powerful learning tool. Within all of the instructional contexts that are part of a comprehensive language and literacy curriculum, learning is mediated by oral language".
Fountas & Pinnell (2011)

Soliciting responses to teacher questions often limits discussion. Students either choose not to respond or the same students respond and teachers call on those students to move the discussion along and get the "right" answer. When classroom participation structures are used they foster oral language development with peer talk and interaction being key.

Turn and Talk is an oral language support strategy that provides students scaffolded interactions to formulate ideas and share their thinking with another student.

When Turn and Talk is used, all students have a chance to share their thinking in a low-risk setting. Verbalizing their thinking scaffolds students understanding and provides talk at a peer level, a model close to the language the student controls.

This is an easy participation structure to establish and use in the full range of settings in classroom instruction in all content areas. Turn and Talk provides the language we speak to become part of the regular classroom procedures.

As with anything in the classroom, routines are very important in implementing structured conversation skills.
1. Determine strategic partners
2. Create and environment that provides partners close proximity for talk to occur
3. Set academic expectations
4. Determine a signal to come to whole group

5. Teach flexibility and problem solving

Students can be partnered in many ways but the partnering should be strategic and not random. It is important to pair students strategically so that both have an opportunity to share during a turn-and-talk. In general we suggest pairing less proficient speakers with students who have a little more language, but not with the most proficient speakers.

Create an area in your classroom where students can sit on the floor in assigned seats next to their partner. Make sure you can access students to observe and hear conversations. Across the grade levels, close proximity may not always be on the floor. Teachers may want students to be able to do this at their desks as well as at the carpet.

In order for students to engage in conversation we need to help them learn how to be effective listeners and speakers.

Students should know who their partner is, where to sit, and how to do a Turn and Talk based on the teacher's expectations.

It is important for students to understand how to take turns and have equal talking time. They need to lean forward, look each other in the eye and speak clearly. You will need to teach them how to be active listeners, prompt their partner to share ideas and ask clarifying questions.

Anchor charts contain key elements of what is being taught, and should be hung up in the classroom for students to refer to. The list of indicators on the anchor chart should be reflective of the skills of the students in your classroom and reflect what you have modeled for students. This list may grow over time as you add new skills. For example: after we have taught students to prompt their partner to say more we could then add that to the anchor chart.

Whatever signal you use, ensure that students know what to do when they hear or see it.

- What are your expectations for finishing a Turn and Talk? Consider whether you want a quiet signal or one that requires students to respond verbally.
  How should students respond when they hear the signal?
- Do they stop speaking immediately?
- Do they have sufficient time (10 seconds) to finish their sentence?
- Is there a preliminary signal and then a final signal a few second later to allow students time to finish their thought? Consider whatever signal you already use in your classroom, or add a new one.

After students master procedures and are able to problem solve around a missing partner, you can allow for more flexibility in partnering. Providing students with some opportunities to choose their own partners, or for you to assign different partners will help them to become more flexible. It also allows you options to pair students in a way that will help you to differentiate based on the content and language objective you are trying to achieve.

It is important to strategically plan Turn and Talk to allow students a chance to talk about the content and to ensure the questions are open-ended and require students to provide thoughtful answers. Turn and Talk can be woven into every content area and throughout the day.

Open-ended questions allow students to think critically and support their ability to articulate their understanding of the teaching point. The teachers should consider the language demands of the content and their question, and may choose to provide sentence stems to help the students to answer the question.

Open-ended questions require more than a few words to answer. It's important to use open-ended questions because they allow for more student talk and support critical thinking and argumentation skills, as required by the new Common Core State Standards.

IMPLEMENT
Conversation is something that we as adults do naturally.
Many of us are conversational learners and make meaning about content and our world through conversation. But students don't necessarily come to school knowing the intricacies of conversation. It is critical for students to learn what listening and speaking look and sound in order to be able to engage with the content. Thinking and talking about information transforms information into personal knowledge. Purposeful talk helps to guide that transformation.

Modeling a Turn and Talk allows the students to see and hear what one should look and sound like and what is expected of the students.

It is very important to teach the importance of listening and speaking (conversation skills). We need to explicitly model these steps and bring them to students' attention. While at first it may seem artificial to teach some of these skills in isolation, students need to be made aware of the skills needed and then be taught how to integrate them to have a conversation.

This talk is a lens into what the child currently understands, what content vocabulary they are able to articulate, and the level of sentence structure used in conveying the depth of understanding. For example does the child respond with one word, a simple sentence, an unfinished thought or incomprehensible output, or a sophisticated, well supported response? Listening in provides the teacher with next steps based on what is heard and in relation to the teaching point.

Turn and Talk is an opportunity for teachers to listen to and observe students. Are students making meaning with the content? As we listen in on paired conversations, we can provide a prompt if we see a conversation has stalled and then move on to another pair as a way to differentiate in the moment. It is important to keep the multiple conversations moving by not getting too involved in one conversation. This is also a time when we can assess students' language structures, academic language, and content vocabulary.

Turn and Talk gives us a window in to what a student is thinking and whether they have the language to express their ideas. Listening to partner exchange allows for assessment of language skills, and allows the teacher the opportunity to see if the concepts are being grasped.

Student talk is essential in order to provide students with opportunities to process content and for the teacher to assess understanding. Turn and Talk helps the teacher to ascertain background knowledge, (check for understanding) throughout the lesson, or as a vehicle for students to recap the learning from the lesson.

REFLECT
"Language is a cultural tool we use it to share experience and so to collectively, jointly, make sense of it...Language is therefore not just a means by which individuals can formulate ideas and communicate them, it is also a means for people to think and learn together."
Neil Mercer, 1995

Are the students paired appropriately?
- Do I need to make changes?
- Can students adjust if a partner is missing?
- Can my students face each other and speak to each other comfortably in this setting?

Are students meeting expectations for the T&T routines? If not, what needs to be re-taught, and to whom?
- Do we need more practice?
- Can some students model for others?
- Who needs more help?
- What specifically is challenging?

Were students able to use/respond to the prompt?
- Did the prompt extend the conversation?
- What did I learn about the students' understanding of the content from the Turn and Talk?

What did I learn about their language?
- Did students use the academic language of the lesson? Why or why not?
- What can I do next time to make the Turn and Talk more effective for student learning?

Next steps are determined by what we are hearing and seeing as we listen in on student talk. Once routines have become automatic, our next steps turn to the strategic planning:
- What scaffolds students need?
- What prompts and or questions will I use to promote a conversation between students?
- How will I help foster student independence?
- What academic language, vocabulary and structures do I need to teach?
- What questions and prompt will provide opportunities for students to use the language?
- How will I provide opportunities for students to continue to practice the language and for peers to interact using the language?
- How will I provide opportunities for students to initiate language use and generalize to other contexts?