

4 Types of Teacher Dialog in Professional Learning Contexts*

DISCONNECTED TALK:

- Teachers' comments are disconnected from each other and the group's collaborative purpose; teachers tell stories and give each other advice.
- Comments are authoritative statements or personal stories.
- Talk about teaching is general and there's frequent use of labels and generalizations.
- Claims are asserted as fact with only anecdotal evidence.
- Teachers are very sure of what they say.
- When questions are asked, they are technical, procedural, or personal; meanings, assumptions, beliefs, and values are seldom questioned – and when they are, it's considered rude.
- There are few links to instruction.
- Knowledge and beliefs are fixed.
- Teachers are congenial with each other, but some don't contribute.

CONNECTED TALK:

- Comments connect to an immediate task but don't build on other teachers' ideas.
- Ideas are shared as factual or authoritative.
- The dialogue is descriptive or evaluative with frequent use of labels and generalizations.
- Evidence is used to justify claims, sometimes with artifacts, often with anecdotes.
- Teachers occasionally express uncertainty or curiosity.
- Questions are procedural, technical, or for clarification; meanings, assumptions, beliefs, values are not pursued collectively.
- Links to instruction are seldom explored.
- Knowledge and beliefs are relatively fixed.
- Teachers are more or less congenial, with some members contributing only occasionally.

EXPLORATORY TALK:

- Teachers build on each others' ideas with some pursuit of common meaning-making, critical comments, and alternatives.
- Teachers tacitly reach out to each other for genuine dialogue.
- The dialogue alternates between description and analysis.
- Evidence is shared, but it may be weak or unclear; questions are raised.
- There's a noticeable element of wondering and uncertainty.
- Authentic questions emerge; meanings, assumptions, beliefs, values are raised but may not be pursued deeply.
- Some links to instruction are made.
- Knowledge and beliefs are occasionally questioned and reexamined.
- Teachers are congenial, and most contribute in discussions.

INQUIRY-BASED TALK:

- Teachers' comments build on each other and dialogue spans meetings; teachers critique each other; alternatives are posed and examined.
- Teachers' comments are tentative and invite dialogue.
- Descriptions support analysis.
- Evidence is sought, provided, and critically analyzed by the group, and new questions are raised.
- Teachers hypothesize; group members often use tentative statements like, "I wonder," "Maybe," and "Do you think..."
- Authentic questions emerge from artifacts; meanings, assumptions, beliefs, and values are examined.
- Links to instructional practices are critically examined.
- Knowledge and beliefs are regularly questioned and examined.
- Teachers are collegial with each other and, over time, all participants contribute.

* From "Two Dimensions of an Inquiry Stance Toward Student-Learning Data" by Tamara Holmlund Nelson, David Slavit, and Angie Deuel in *Teachers College Record*, August 2012 (Vol. 114, #8, p. 1-42),