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REVOICING

A Tool to Engage All Learners in Academic Conversations

Sarah J. Ferris

During a class discussion, my fourth graders were describing what they had discovered while dissecting owl pellets in a science investigation. Maria (all names are pseudonyms), one of my English learners (ELs), remarked that she found “inside pieces soft...and is broken.” Confused, I found myself nodding and saying, “Hmmm, how interesting,” while thinking, “What does she mean by ‘soft’?” Although I wasn’t sure what she meant, how could I frame my language to acknowledge her thinking, encourage elaboration, and move the conversation forward?

Sometimes it can be challenging to know how to respond to puzzling contributions by students. They may have misinterpreted the question, or we may have misunderstood them. In addition, the discourse patterns of many ELs may differ from the expected patterns and academic language structures used daily in classrooms (Michaels, O’Connor, Hall, & Resnick, 2010). Furthermore, the importance of teaching students how to participate in academic conversations is often overlooked or ignored completely in schools (Calkins, 2000).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) highlight the importance of both speaking and listening, describing that students should “contribute accurate, relevant information; respond to and develop what others have said; make comparisons and contrasts; and analyze and synthesize a multitude of ideas in various domains” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 22). The standards emphasize

college and career readiness to help prepare students with the skills needed to succeed beyond graduating high school. How can we support students in meeting these expectations outlined in the CCSS?

Accountable Talk, a set of research-based techniques, provides a framework for teachers to use as they strive to equip students with the skills necessary to carry on academically stimulating conversations. Research has shown Accountable Talk practices to result in the academic achievement among students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds across a variety of grade levels and content areas (Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2008). Accountable Talk consists of three key dimensions (Michaels et al., 2008):

1. Accountability to the learning community—how students listen, question, and engage with one another to clarify or expand thinking
2. Accountability to knowledge—how students use prior knowledge and new knowledge to make evidence for claims and arguments when addressing a topic
3. Accountability to standards of reasoning—how students use strategies to deliver arguments, make conclusions, and challenge others’ reasoning.

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Figure 1 Talk Moves

Talk Moves	
Revoicing	So let me see if I understand your thinking: you said _____, is that right?
Restating	Can you repeat what _____ just said in your own words?
Adding On	Would you like to add anything to what _____ said? Please say more about _____.
Reasoning	Do you agree or disagree and why?
Extending	Why do you think that? How did you get your answer?
Examples	Is this always true? Do you have an example? Can you think of examples that would not work?
Wait Time	Take your time. We can wait for you to think.

Teachers encourage Accountable Talk through a variety of “talk moves” (see Figure 1) that exist to scaffold

Pause and Ponder

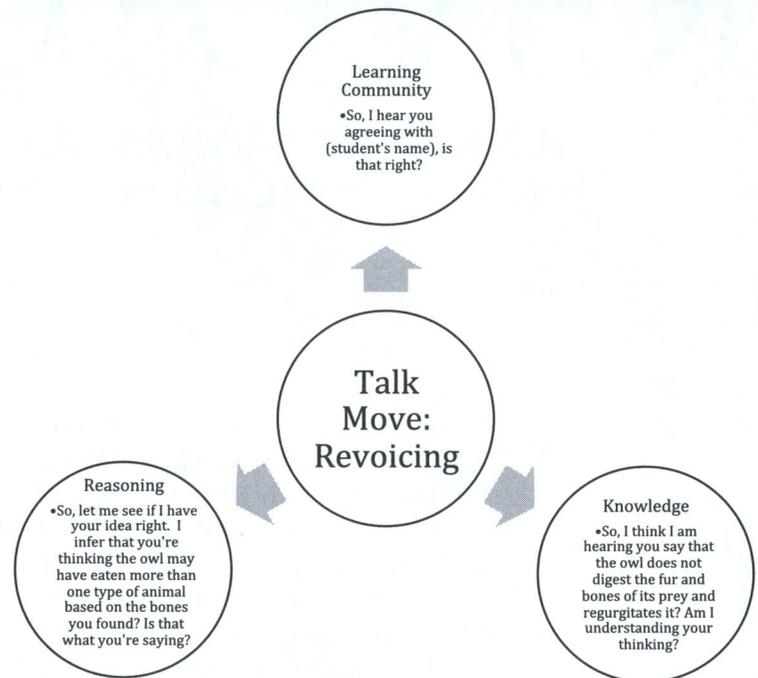
- What kinds of follow up responses do you make when facilitating class discussions?
- Are your responses different in whole group vs. small group vs. work with individuals?
- How often have you analyzed the kinds of “talk” occurring in your classroom?
- Reflect on the supports you currently provide for helping students engage in academic discourse.

teacher–student and student–student discourse. The following provide a foundation for teachers to use: revoicing, restating, reasoning, adding on, and wait time (Chapin, O’Connor, & Anderson, 2009). Talk moves are ways to frame questions and responses in classroom discourse. This article focuses on one of the talk moves known as revoicing, which is a relatively simple way to get started with using Accountable Talk.

What Is Revoicing?

Revoicing involves repeating back all or part of what a student has contributed to a discussion with one additional step: teachers verifying whether they have interpreted the student’s utterance correctly (O’Connor & Michaels, 1993; 1996). By asking “is that right?” the student is invited to respond again

Figure 2 Revoicing and the Three Dimensions of Accountable Talk



to validate the teacher’s interpretation and possibly expand the contribution while practicing oral language output. Revoicing can become intertwined with all three accountability components of the Accountable Talk framework, as different forms of language can be used in a revoicing to serve different functions, or purposes (see Figure 2).

Revoicing allows teachers to push for the expansion and clarification of student ideas, making it an effective place to begin using talk moves. Students have an opportunity to hear the interpretation of their response, allowing them to reconstruct their thinking. Through revoicing, teachers model language use and are also held accountable to the learning community, to knowledge, and to reasoning as they strive

to make sense of student ideas (see Figure 3).

In addition, students can respond in their first language, and teachers can revoice student utterances back in English, if this translation is possible. Another suggestion is to encourage ELs to first respond in their native language and support them to follow up their thinking in English to allow for the transfer of concepts. Teachers may also choose to restate the student's contribution using academic vocabulary and language structures.

How Does Revoicing Support Learners?

Using revoicing as a discourse strategy has been researched predominately in mathematics classrooms (Enyedy et al., 2008; Forman & Ansell, 2002, Moschkovich, 1999), and data from the longitudinal Project Challenge study suggests that incorporating academically productive talk into math lessons can have an impact on improving students' scores on standardized tests while supporting the development of metacognitive thinking, reasoning, and communication

skills, as well as enhancing motivation to participate during discussions (Chapin et al., 2009). Revoicing benefits all learners for several reasons (Chapin et al., 2009; Enyedy et al., 2008; Forman & Ansell, 2002; Michaels et al., 2010; Moschkovich, 1999):

- Allows students' ideas to be transmitted or "aired" again so others can hear and process what is being said—Students may respond too quietly or produce confusing contributions to the listeners. Hearing an idea again helps all participants reflect further on the meaning behind it.
 - Clears up misconceptions and clarifies students' thinking—Students can evaluate their response, which provides another opportunity for changes to be made to their original utterance. Students may also choose to add something that shows their thinking more clearly to others.
 - Gives students a chance to correct the teacher or expand
- Provides "thinking space" for students—Revoicing allows a student's response to be "frozen in time" so all participants can process it, including the student. Using this as a kind of "wait time" is valuable because it gives students more time to think about and process the language being used.
 - Enables teachers to model academic language and vocabulary back to students—When teachers revoice students' responses back another time with higher level discourse structures and content vocabulary, the students get the credit and the other students hear it too.
 - Encourages students to interact without having a "right" or "wrong" answer—Students realize that the teacher is truly interested in understanding their responses. Revoicing helps create more of a low-pressure environment, as sometimes students may feel reluctant or embarrassed about participating in class discussions.

Figure 3 Revoicing Example

Teacher: Why do you think you found broken bones in your owl pellet?

Student: Because the barn owl eats its prey and when it throws it back up, things get all broken up...

Teacher: So, you are saying that you think you found broken bones in your owl pellet because the barn owl first eats, or swallows, its prey and then throws up, or regurgitates, it back up and the bones get broken, is that right?

Student: Yeah, it's like what we watched on the video, and the owls regurgitate what they eat.

In essence, revoicing provides an avenue to model how language is used to construct thinking. It gives students the chance to extend and expand on their contributions, as well as validate that the teacher has interpreted or inferred the intended meaning of their response. As students begin to see

revoicing used more frequently across a variety of lessons and subject areas, they begin to catch on to how the move is being used. With multiple opportunities for practice, students can start to use talk moves such as revoicing with their peers to engage in content and challenge each other as active listeners and participants in the classroom conversation.

Teachers Using the Revoicing Talk Move

First, choose a lesson or activity that promotes rich academic discussion to model how to use revoicing as a strategic talk move. You might try it first with an interactive read-aloud, stopping every so often to ask higher order thinking questions that allow for student response and elaboration. Or, starting with a science lesson can allow you to model during whole-group discussions and encourage students to use the talk move in small groups during experiments.

Intentionally plan several questions that will elicit student responses requiring use of academic concepts, language structures, or reasoning. Preparing response prompts as sentence starters will aid students in framing answers to the questions, and displaying these on a chart or easel will help support the demonstration (see Figure 4). Another option is to make note cards or placemats for table groups or for each student. Consider the age and grade level of your students, as this

Figure 4 Questions and Response Frames

Question	Response Frame
What do you see?  notice? observe?	I see... notice... observe...
Why do you think?  feel? wonder? predict? hypothesize?	I think...because ____ feel...because ____ wonder...because ____ predict...because ____ hypothesize...because ____
Do you have any questions? 	I have a question about ____ My question is... ____
Do you agree or disagree?  	I agree with ____ because ____ I disagree with ____ because ____ I still feel confused about... ____
How do you know?  	For example... Because of ____, I know ____ This reminds me... From what I know and see, I infer...

may affect the materials you choose to use and design to help scaffold classroom discourse (e.g., charts, visuals).

After posing a question, invite students to turn and talk with partners

before responding to increase overall participation. When you begin the whole-group discussion, respond to student comments with, "So I hear/infer that you are saying _____, is that right?" Model wait time, use an appropriate tone, and encourage turn-taking while speaking with students. Making audio or video recordings of the lesson and reflecting afterward provide an opportunity for you to analyze interactions and make improvements for future lessons.

"In essence, revoicing provides an avenue to model how language is used to construct thinking."

Not every student utterance may need to be revoiced, and at times teachers may feel that the student's contribution becomes their idea instead of the student's (Herbel-Eisenmann, Drake, & Cirillo, 2009). Reflect on your classroom discussions: How often are you revoicing? Do you notice a difference in how students are participating? Are interactions directed mostly between you and one student at a time, or are multiple students engaging in the discourse with you? After trying the talk move, you can strive to facilitate interactions between students and their peers so that they may begin to revoice one another's comments.

Students Using the Revoicing Talk Move

Once you have become familiar using revoicing, you can teach it directly to your students. Have students practice revoicing with one another so they begin to take ownership for using the talk move. Ongoing practice in a variety of talk formats, including partners, small groups, whole-class discussions, and student presentations, can help students develop and learn the talk move over time (Chapin et al., 2009). Continue to have students work in partners or small groups using the revoicing frame in a variety of lessons. Putting students in different grouping configurations will allow for practice with a variety of their peers. Once revoicing has become part of the classroom culture, you can begin to introduce more talk moves (see Figure 1).

Introducing talk moves at the beginning of the year establishes the tone for classroom discussions, and students can

internalize the language as the school year continues by relying less on the sentence frame prompts. Over time, you can set expectations that students will interact with one another using a variety of talk moves, making each other more accountable in all classroom exchanges.

Closing Thoughts

By revoicing Maria's description of the "soft" pieces, I might have found she meant the animal bones were "fragile." Or, maybe our conversation would have taken a new direction. Perhaps more students would have built on her response had we explored it further. Revoicing supports ELs, and it benefits everyone.

Talk moves must be explicitly taught because not all talk advances thinking and learning. With continued practice, students discover that their thoughts, knowledge, and reasoning are respected within the classroom community, and teachers become more deliberate in creating meaningful discussions. The revoicing talk move serves as a valuable tool for teachers to get started building better academic conversations across the content areas, allowing students to develop both the social and academic language skills they will continue to use long after they leave the classroom.

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MORE TO EXPLORE

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