

# **BUILDING BIGGER IDEAS**

**A Process for Teaching  
Purposeful Talk**

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*To the educators  
and children  
who've welcomed me  
into their communities  
and their conversations.*

*Thank you for  
your openness, trust, and  
an endless abundance  
of joy.*

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# Introduction

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## Beginning with the End

I was hovering over the dining room table alongside my friend and colleague Debra Crouch—computers, texts, journals, and sticky notes scattered about. We had challenged ourselves into a conversation about what it means to be a teacher of thinkers, and were in that rapid ideation phase of the work, with tentative ideas ranging far and wide.

As we wrestled though the possibilities, no matter what the angle on teaching thinkers, the role of purposeful talk naturally emerged. Debra finally plopped down a well-worn copy of my previous book, *Comprehension Through Conversation* (2006), and, by force of repeated use, it fell open to the last pages. With a laugh, Debra mused, “You know, it seems like I always begin conversations about this book with the end.”

The “end” that Debra was referring to is an exploration of a reading conference with Jailyn—one of my third graders years ago. It was reading workshop, and I had been watching from across the room as Jailyn flipped the pages of Bruce McMillan’s *Nights of the Pufflings* back and forth, seemingly mesmerized and puzzled, both at the same time. McMillan’s narrative introduces readers to the children of a small Icelandic village, who come together each year to help newly hatched pufflings navigate human impediments to find their way to the sea. Curious, I naturally headed over to investigate. I sat down beside Jailyn and opened with my usual “What are you thinking?” Here’s our conversation as recounted in the book:

“I thought they [the children in the text] just do it to care for nature, but I know some kids [in our class] would say the people have to help,” Jailyn explained, “because they shouldn’t have lights and dogs where the pufflings have



to fly. So now I think they are caring, but maybe they also feel guilty ‘cuz it’s their lights that, like, well, that made the pufflings got lost.”

“How do you know that some of the kids would think that?” I asked.

“Well, it’s like when we talked about *The Great Kapok Tree*,” Jailyn said, pointing in the general direction of the Rain Forrest tub in the nonfiction section of the library. “Some kids said the man shouldn’t cut down the tree and live where the animals have to be. But people, they have to live places. But still, we thought they feel, like, well, guilty.”

“Wow, what made you think of all of this?”

“When I’m reading, and, well, always I wonder, what would everybody— all the kids—how do they think about this?” (2006, 102–103)

Debra, I realized, had a point. I’ve been privileged to think alongside teachers, coaches, administrators, and district leaders across the United States and beyond about developing classrooms that are alive with purposeful talk. Inevitably, in the process of these conversations, Jailyn seems to wiggle her way in. I’ll hear variations of, “You know, we want to create a school full of Jailyns.” Or, “We want our students to be able to *use* talk to think and build new ideas, like Jailyn.”

So, what is it about Jailyn’s process that compels? To begin, she’s the embodiment of Vygotsky’s assertion that, “By giving our students practice in talking with others, we give them frames for thinking on their own” (1978, 19). But, I believe there’s more to the aspiration than Jailyn’s independent ability.

As educators, we all recognize that Jailyn’s thinking developed in a classroom where she was supported by specific beliefs about teaching and learning, and about children’s infinite capacity to soar when given the foundation, space, and support. In this environment, Jailyn learned that purposeful talk is a tool for constructing understanding with others. She came to value the diverse perspectives that would broaden and deepen her understanding, and she engaged in an inner-dialogue with these perspectives, developing empathy as she learned to see ideas and issues through the eyes of others.



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No wonder Jailyn has inspired a small flotilla of professional journeys. But, teaching into this vision of possibility can be daunting. Figuring out exactly what we're aiming for and why, and where to start and how, may leave us teetering on the edge of our first steps, knowing we want to leap in, but not yet completely willing to let go.

*Building Bigger Ideas* is intended to pick up where *Comprehension Through Conversation* left off, addressing many of the questions I've explored with teachers, literacy coaches, and school and district leaders as they've worked to develop classrooms and schools that are alive with purposeful talk. Questions such as:

- ★ Why does teaching children to think and talk together purposefully matter?
- ★ How do we define this talk and use that definition to guide our efforts?
- ★ How do we teach into something as dynamic as purposeful talk and trust in children's ability to engage authentically?
- ★ How do we move children toward independence with purposeful talk?

Chapter One focuses on the *why* of purposeful talk, ensuring our efforts are consistently guided by a deep understanding. The chapter opens with a peek at talk in the classroom. Then, it moves beyond the classroom to explore purposeful talk “in the wild,” drawing from collaborative endeavors and innovative environments that thrive on this talk. This exploration will help us define purposeful talk and develop a vision for what becomes possible when children engage daily with teaching and learning shaped by that vision.

For learning to “float on a sea of talk,” as James Britton suggests (1983), children need the support of a brave learning community. These communities are places where children engage openly and honestly with each other, and with compelling, relevant—and often edgy—ideas. Chapter Two explores the ways teachers and children can develop the care, empathy, values, and understandings necessary for brave learning communities to thrive.

Then, Chapters Three through Six tackle the *how* of teaching purposeful talk, offering a process as dynamic as talk itself to engage children authentically and honestly. Chapter Three begins with Rupert

Wegerif's definition of dialogic classrooms as places where children learn *about* talk and *through* talk simultaneously, then briefly revisits three categories of talk behavior, first introduced in *Comprehension Through Conversation*, that support this learning. A process-oriented approach that engages children in **focus**, **facilitate**, and **feedback** cycles is the foundation for this teaching.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six offer a deeper dive into a range of talk moves that comprise each category of talk behavior. I'll explain how each talk move supports children's efforts to construct meaning, the challenges of teaching the moves, and ways we might focus, facilitate, and offer feedback for each. And lastly, Chapter Seven offers questions that help us to take an inquiry stance as we assess children's developing ability to use talk purposefully.

As you read, you'll find children's voices scattered throughout. These delightful voices, captured as the children thought and talked together, come from my own classroom, and from classrooms filled with teachers and children who've welcomed me in to learn alongside them. What I hope emerges from the children's talk is their brilliance, the depth of thinking and understanding that becomes possible when they engage through purposeful talk, and the sheer joy of dialogic classrooms.



*The best ideas emerge  
when very different  
perspectives meet.*

—Frans Johansson



# Four

## Teaching Children to Hear All Voices

### A Snapshot of Purposeful Talk

I am huddled on the carpet with a class of first graders who have been exploring the power of imagination. On this particular day, their inquiry has them delving into Jane Yolen's *What To Do With a Box* (2016). This delightful story, carried by Yolen's sparse rhyme, engages readers' imaginations along with the characters' as they transform a cardboard box from page to page. As the box morphs into a castle unlocked with a magic key—just in the nick of time to shelter characters and readers alike from a fierce dragon—Kylee's delight catches her teacher, Tess', attention:

**Kylee:** AAAAH!

**Tess:** [Laughing] Kylee?

**Kylee:** The dinosaur's getting them!

**Pedro:** No—a dragon! See! [Pointing to the dragon's nose]. The fire comes out!

**Joshua:** It's a castle—they're pretending so it's safe. It's got magic—

**Aiden:** [Shaking head] No—the key is magic!

**Tess:** [Looking around circle, sees Lulu raising up on knees, head shaking vehemently] Lulu?



**Lulu:** It's the imagining—IT does the magic!

**Gabriel:** Yeah, they're imagining!

**Yanaris:** It's magical! They imagine and it's magical—on the other ones [pages], too.

**Jamarie:** Where?

**Kylee:** Hey, Markus giggled! He did—like this! [Imitates Markus' giggle]

**Logan:** Oh—it's because maybe he's got thinking!

**Tess:** What should we ask Markus?

**Many voices:** Markus, why did you giggle? . . . Do you have thinking? . . . Markus, what did you giggle for? . . .

This little bit of talk is spunky, joyful, and deceptively powerful. Kylee's squeals—and her delight in what she perceives to be a dinosaur—launches a meaning-making exploration. The children are leaning into the literal, trying to make sense of what they're seeing. Then, Lulu has a different theory about the imagining and the source of the magic than Joshua and Aiden. This sparks broader thinking in Yanaris' mind, shifting the meaning making to another level.

The conversation also offers insights into the children's use of purposeful talk. Eight out of the twenty-two children were involved in this snippet. The others were engaged alongside them, heads swiveling from the text to the speaker, and from each speaker to the next. Some were nodding or shaking, and there were several quizzical faces pondering both the dragon and castle and the notion of the magical qualities of imagination. Then Markus, a voice that had been outwardly silent to that point, giggled. Kylee noticed, Logan wondered about the potential, and with a nudge from Tess, a new voice was invited into the conversation.

## Why Hearing All Voices Matters

Even in this brief excerpt of talk, the way children listen and build on each other's ideas shows that they value each other's thinking. The attention to that giggle, and the quick response to invite a new voice into the conversation because there might be thinking there, is clear

evidence that they are developing strategies to draw from, or hear, all voices in a conversation.

At a literal level, hearing all voices can easily be misconstrued as a checklist-able goal. Brian spoke today—check! Heard from Emma—check! In reality, though, the *why* behind hearing all voices has far greater depth, situating it at the very heart of purposeful talk’s constructive potential. In Chapter One, we explored David Kelley’s assertion that thinking and talking with others helps us “get to a place that you just can’t get to in one mind,” suggesting the power of differing perspectives. Our classrooms are naturally and thankfully composed of a unique range of voices, each with different life experiences and different ways of viewing the world. As children think and talk together, this rich range of perspectives helps them to construct understandings that are bigger and bolder than they might construct on their own. This is the intent behind hearing all voices. We want children to experience the constructive potency of many voices, honor each, and learn the value of their own.

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Hearing all voices does present challenges, however. Just like adults, children have different patterns of participation in talk. Some have no trouble adding their voice early and often, and we hear their thinking loud and clear, multiple times over, in every conversation. It may be that these children actually talk to think. Or it may be that they don’t yet understand the value of—or have strategies for—drawing thinking from others.

Other children tend to wrestle with thoughts internally first. Although silent on the outside, there is often a raging conversation on the inside. As Robin Alexander notes, “those who are not speaking at a given time participate no less actively by listening, looking, reflecting, evaluating” (2008, 42). A smirk or furrowed brow, a glint in an eye, or a sly smile may hint at what’s simmering in a child’s mind. For these children, ideas may emerge slowly in turn and talks as they use their partners to help tease out their thinking. Or, their voices may enter a whole-group conversation over time as the collective thinking gradually helps them to strengthen their own.

Too, we know from our own experience that, when ideas resonate or touch close to home, we tend to chime in easily and passionately. But when ideas are unfamiliar or perplexing, we may hang back, wrestling with uncertainty. As I suggest this, I'm thinking of my own extended conversation with friends, propelled by a Marketplace Money radio series focused on the Eastern Congo. Over the span of a week, we listened to and talked about daily segments exploring the process of reconstructing an economy in an area rich with mineral wealth, yet still lagging in human development. Engaging in this conversation was daunting, as my friends were surprisingly well versed in the issues. Struggling to form questions, and hesitant to offer naïve opinions, I held back early on, hovering on the edge of the conversation as I listened and pieced together bits of information and insights. Although relatively silent on the outside, my mind was a swirl of puzzlement, questions, and tentative insights. Gradually, I waded in, becoming an increasingly vocal participant.

In this same way, each child's participation may vary from conversation to conversation based on a variety of factors, including the nature of the ideas being discussed. The takeaway here is that hearing all voices isn't as simple as instituting systematic turn-taking protocols. Although initiated with the best of intentions, these protocols may actually override an authentic, constructive flow of talk by emphasizing quantity of talk and equity in turn taking over meaning making. Structured turn taking tends to frustrate our "talk early, talk often" children, and creates undue stress for our shy or more contemplative children. Too, protocols tend to emphasize compliance through extrinsic control of talk over the development of an intrinsic value for a rich range of voices, the development of internally controlled strategies for adding one's voice productively, and attention to the flow of meaning.

It may be more useful—and more in keeping with the nature of real conversational process—to consider each child's pattern of participation over time as we implement processes for drawing in all voices. Becoming comfortable with the varied ways children's voices engage in an ebb and flow of meaning making, ranging from quiet contemplation and tentativeness to passionate loquaciousness, encourages us to provide variation in talk opportunities, strategies, and supports.

## Teaching Talk Behaviors for Hearing All Voices

Teaching children the value of hearing all voices begins with building their awareness—awareness of the power of drawing thinking from others; awareness of different patterns of participation; and awareness of each child’s own particular pattern or talk personality. Our “talk early, talk often” children, especially, need support to notice who’s talking and who’s not and to see the ways other voices affect their thinking. As children develop awareness of variations in participation, they also develop a keen understanding of why it matters, and will be more open to using the talk behaviors we offer them for hearing all voices.

### Being Silent

Sometimes, inviting new voices into a conversation is as simple as not talking. Staying silent is not about being disinterested or disengaged. Rather, it’s a deliberate move to open space for children to think, form tentative beginnings of ideas, and wrestle a bit with the uncertainty that might keep them from voicing their thinking out loud.

To be certain, even a few moments of silence can be uncomfortable at first. To focus children on the importance of silence, we might say, *If I pause a bit, it’s to give you time to think, and to get your thinking out. You don’t need to wait for me to ask a question—if you have a thought or question of your own, add it to the conversation.*

Then, at key points, as we **facilitate**, we might look up from the text with a *Wow!* or a *Hmmm*. . . . And, we hold back, trusting that children are truly thinking brilliant thoughts—or the beginnings of brilliant thoughts—and that this thinking will find its way out. Invitations such as, *Take a moment of thinking time*, invite silence. Or we may cock our head, raise an eyebrow, or look around the circle with anticipation, offering a nonverbal rendition of, *I can’t wait to hear what you’re thinking!*

This moment or two of silence gives us an opportunity to notice. We may notice facial expressions showing the spark of an idea or confusion. We notice whose voice finds its way into the conversation, and whose

“Sometimes, inviting new voices into a conversation is as simple as not talking.”



doesn't. Then, as the first bits of thinking emerge, we notice what aspects of the text children are tuning into, and what aspects may not have caught their attention.

Our **feedback** then needs to help children see how the moments of quiet thinking led to stronger talk, or helped them steer the conversation in a particular direction, or ask a pivotal question. *After we thought for a bit, Rolland realized something wasn't making sense to him. He didn't wait for me to ask a question. Instead, he asked a question. We went back into the text to reread, and it helped us all to make sense of things.*

## Reading Facial Expressions

As children engage in meaning making, we know that silence on the outside doesn't necessarily equate to silence on the inside. To draw outwardly quiet thinkers into conversations, we attend closely to facial expressions and body language, and use these cues to draw children in. This is exactly what a kindergarten teacher, Susie, was doing as she read "Little Miss Muffet" with her children and they came to the phrase "eating her curds and whey." Surveying the children, Susie noticed Abdul, whose head was tilting to the side, his nose wrinkling in confusion. "I have to stop right there. Abdul's face went like this," Susie notes, making a confused face. "What were you wondering about, Abdul?"

The kinders giggle and lean forward to survey Abdul's face as he smiles up at Susie. "Eating her curds and whey?" Susie poses. Abdul nods as she asks, "Do you have a question?" Abdul starts to speak, then slowly shakes his head. "You're not sure, are you?" Susie continues. "Why don't you see if your partner knows what curds and whey are? Ask them—say, 'What's curds and whey?'" The kinders, still full of giggles, all take up Susie's suggestion, turn to their partners, and choruses of "What's curds and whey?" quickly fill the room.

Susie, reading Abdul's face, recognized that he was thinking intently, and most likely had an as-of-yet unvoiced question raging in his head. She capitalized on his expression to invite his voice, but Abdul's thoughts were simply too jumbled at that point to articulate. So Susie articulated for him, and Abdul experienced the constructive power of a question conjured inside his mind, even though his words didn't quite make it out on their own.

“As children engage in meaning making, we know that silence on the outside doesn't necessarily equate to silence on the inside.”

Not only is reading facial expressions and body language an important aspect of thinking and talking with others, it's also a gentle way to acknowledge a quiet child's thinking and a natural opening to invite their voice. We may **focus** children on this possibility by saying things like, *We've been noticing how much stronger our thinking is when we hear from lots of voices. To help us do this, let's watch facial expressions, and notice when someone who's been thinking quietly inside their head is smiling, or frowning, or looking surprised. If you notice this, you can ask that person what they're thinking.*

To **facilitate**, we're on the lookout for those gestures and facial expressions that reveal yet-to-be-voiced thinking. Comments such as, *I'm noticing shaking/nodding heads . . .*, or *I'm seeing frowns/grins/ puzzled looks . . .*, help children recognize when they have thoughts to add, and serve as an invitation to do so. As children become accustomed to you reading and responding to their expressions, they will begin to do the same. Prompts such as, *Is anyone noticing the expression on Abdul's face? I wonder what he's thinking . . .* entice children to take the reins.

**Feedback** should help children understand how noticing a nonverbal cue helped the group to hear otherwise-quiet voices: *When Abdul had that look on his face, we paused to hear his thinking. We realized we were all wondering about curds and whey. Taking time to talk about it helped us to understand that Little Miss Muffet was having breakfast and that's why she didn't notice the spider and was so scared. So, noticing the look on someone's face and asking about their thinking helps us!*

## Encouraging Tentative Thinking

As children talk to understand, their initial thoughts are often tentative in nature, marked by expressions such as, *I think . . .* or *Maybe . . .* We see this tentative, exploratory talk in the first graders' thinking and talking about Jane Yolen's *What To Do With a Box*. A dinosaur? A dragon? Is it the castle that's magic, or the key? Or is the power of imagination the real magic? Each of these tentative thoughts has the power to spark bigger thinking. Markus was either reveling in this tentative thinking, or he had his own possibilities brewing—hence, his giggle. To truly gather from a range of voices, we

“As children talk to understand, their initial thoughts are often tentative in nature, marked by expressions such as, *I think . . .* or *Maybe . . .*”

need to create an environment that honors this tentativeness, as opposed to creating an expectation of fully fleshed-out (and grammatically correct) responses or answers.

When we **focus** children on the possibilities opened by tentative, exploratory thinking, we say things like, *We've been noticing the importance of getting our thinking out, even if it's still a bit uncertain. Little bits of thoughts spark thinking in other people, and that's important if we're going to grow ideas together. Today, notice if you have beginning thinking, and add it to our conversation so others can help to grow it.*

To **facilitate** and support children as they confidently voice tentativeness, the key is to actively invite beginning thinking: *Who has a thought? Is anyone wondering . . . ? Why might . . . ?* Tentative thinking not only encourages wondering and questions, but it also draws out elaborations or explorations that strengthen the current line of thought, or ideas that create doubt, causing all to rethink. Responding to tentative thinking can be as simple as showing we're intrigued by leaning in with a *Hmmm . . .*, confirming for children that they don't need fully formed ideas to engage.

**Feedback** should focus on the thinking that grew from tentativeness. It may sound like this: *Today, we talked a lot about what was in the heart of our characters. It started when DiAngelo said that something was happening between two of them, even though he wasn't sure exactly what it was yet. Adding that thinking mattered, because then Kyle realized he was feeling the same way. He said that he thought it was meanness, and that got us thinking closely about one of the character's words. Now we know more about the ways a character's words help us to understand. That's why it's important to add your thinking any time you're talking together, even if you're still a bit unsure.*

## Honoring Questions

When wrestling with new thinking, children's first response may be puzzlement, which often emerges in the form of questions. Honoring these questions bolsters children's understanding that they don't need fully constructed ideas to add their voice to a conversation.

The children talking about *What To Do With a Box* were willing to voice their tentative thinking as they considered the origin of the magic they saw in the illustrations. Lulu linked the magic to the power of imagi-

nation, which piqued the interest of Gabriel and Yanaris. Surely there were a few questions forming as that thought settled in, and we want children to see that sharing their questions makes an important contribution to the constructive process.

As we **focus** children on honoring questions, we remind them of the power of their own questions as they construct meaning: *As we think and talk together today, you may have questions bubbling up in your head. We know that these questions help us to dig in—so be sure to ask them out loud!*

Then, as we **facilitate**, a simple way to create space for children's questions is by pausing at critical points and asking, *What are you wondering?* or *What has you curious?* And, as challenging as it is, we need to resist the temptation to answer children's questions ourselves. Instead, we offer prompts such as, *Hmmm—what do you all think?* This helps children realize that their classmates' questions are theirs to tackle, and serves as an invitation for adding more voices.

To help children recognize the power of their own questions, we offer **feedback** that traces meaning making back to those questions: *Today, we explored the feelings between two characters using their thoughts and actions. Our thinking helped us to better understand each character. This work all started when Johana asked a question, and you all took it up and wrestled with it. When you notice you have questions, be sure to ask them!*

“When wrestling with new thinking, children's first response may be puzzlement, which often emerges in the form of questions.”

## Using Turn and Talk Purposefully

The turn and talk plays a pivotal role in hearing all voices. But, too often, turn and talks are scheduled into conversations as a matter of protocol. To be more productive, turn and talks need to be used thoughtfully as a flexible support for the ongoing meaning making.

Complexity has a way of silencing even the most talkative groups. A turn and talk can be a strategic move when children are struggling. Time with a partner gives all children the opportunity to articulate confusion, ask questions, clarify, or retrace the thinking. This time for productive struggle also allows us to listen in on partner conversations, alert for footholds that might move the conversation forward when we reconvene.

We also need to be prepared for times when meaning making hits a combustive high and we seem to be hearing all voices all at once. A turn



and talk allows for a productive harnessing of that energy as children satisfy their need to talk immediately.

Perhaps most importantly, a turn and talk supports more reticent voices. A few minutes with a trusted partner may help children build confidence to add a tentative thought to the whole-group conversation. Of course, when a quieter or more contemplative child engages in turn and talk, the more talkative partner may be the one who ends up sharing the pair's thinking with the whole group. Even if this is the case, the turn and talk has enabled the quieter child's perspective to become part of the collective thinking. This is the primary purpose behind hearing all voices, so it's critical that we're listening in on these partnerships and nudging this.

To **focus** children on using turn and talks more productively, we might say something like, *Today, we may use a turn and talk. If we do, remember this is an opportunity for you to share tentative thinking, ask questions, or have your partner help you think about ideas that seem confusing.*

As the whole group talks together, we watch for waning talk, points where the children all seem to need to talk at once, or points where a turn and talk might support the quieter voices. If we see this happen, we **facilitate** by inviting children to turn to their partners and take a few minutes to think and talk together. As we listen, we may check in on our quieter children, our "talk early, talk often" children, and partnerships that seem to be building provocative thinking. Then, to bring this thinking and these voices into the larger conversation, we might say to the partners, *That's an interesting thought. Let's bring the group back together and see what the others think.* The amount of support we offer here will depend on the specific children. If we're drawing out a more reticent voice, we may orchestrate partner support, or lean in ourselves.

When this happens, the **feedback** should acknowledge the quiet child as the origin of, or a voice in, the thinking that was shared: *During our turn and talk, Benji asked a question that really made Tatianna think. They had a tentative idea that Tatianna shared with the group. Benji's question, and his thinking with Tatianna, helped us to grow that new idea.* This feedback helps all to understand the potential of the turn and talk, and has the added benefit of helping quieter children like Benji understand the power of their voice.

## Inviting Others into the Conversation

As children begin to understand the value of many voices, we need to nudge them to actually invite more voices into the conversation. The goal is to help children—talkative ones especially—attend to the range of voices in a conversation because they’re learning to value others’ thinking—not because of rules or protocols that aim to limit their airtime.

We might **focus** this work in this way: *We’ve been noticing that our quiet thinkers sometimes have ideas we haven’t talked about. If you notice we haven’t heard someone’s thinking yet, you might ask them if they’re ready to add it.* We can also frame the focus to specifically highlight *why* it’s helpful to invite new thinking into a conversation. *Today, pay attention to how your thinking is growing or shifting. If you realize your thinking isn’t growing or shifting, invite new voices into the conversation.*

**Facilitation** is then angled toward our talkative children, basically inviting them to invite others: *Naomi, it looks like Kenny has thinking. Why don’t you ask him about it?* Or, when an expected voice emerges again, we might pause and say, *Hmmm, I wonder how that thought is settling with everyone. Try inviting a few people into the conversation to find out!*

Finally, **feedback** should help children reflect on the degree to which thoughts from others helped their thinking to grow. We might notice and name like this: *Naomi, when you asked Hallie what she thought about your idea, she actually disagreed. Her reason gave us all new thinking. That’s exactly why it’s such a good move to invite new voices into the conversation!*

You may find it helpful to include private focus and feedback time for more persistent “talk early, talk often” children, too. In *Talking About Text*, I share how I helped Monique, a former student, develop an awareness of her own talkative nature (2008, 103–105). It was a long journey, but eventually Monique’s reflective process morphed into daily musings about the ways her thinking grew and shifted because of others’ ideas. She gradually came to realize that, if her thinking didn’t grow or shift, she needed to up her listening effort.

## Writing Your Way into the Conversation

In our classrooms, we often create charts as we're talking with children to track the thinking as it unfolds, making the ongoing meaning-making process visible. We can also invite children to jot thoughts or questions on sticky notes and add them to our charts on their own as they continue to grow their ideas. Adding thinking with sticky notes may happen as children revisit the text, gain insights from different texts, or simply as they continue thinking and talking about the ideas. Sticky notes are also helpful tools for quieter children, or those who need more time to formulate thinking, to add their voice to the conversation.

To encourage children to use this option, we **focus** children on this option at the *end* of a conversation: *As you think more about this, if you have a new idea, question, or wondering, write it on a sticky note and add it to our chart! I'll leave the sticky notes right here. Be sure to add your name so others can talk with you about your thinking.* We may even nudge by adding a sticky note of our own at some point in the day, placing it where—and when—little eyes will be sure to notice!

When children do add thinking to a chart, we survey the possibilities and choose one or two promising lines of thinking to engage the class on subsequent days. For example, a first-grade class had been reading Jim Arnosky's *Raccoons and Ripe Corn* (1991), a delightful tale of a raccoon family stealing from a cornfield under the cover of darkness to feast. During the whole-group conversation, Cali, who tends toward the more contemplative end of the participation spectrum, had engaged in turn and talks, and intently followed the conversation, but we had not heard her voice in the whole group. Later that day, a pink sticky note appeared on the chart. This sticky note held a single question, and it was signed by none other than Cali. It read, "Do the pepl no?"

The next day, as we revisited the text, I reminded the children that the notes are a way to add new thinking to a conversation, and then I brought Cali's thinking to the group. Notice my **facilitation** moves:

**Maria:** [Reading Cali's sticky note] Cali asked, "Do the people know?" Cali, what people are you wondering about?

**Cali:** At the farm.

**Nicola:** It has a farm?

**Maria:** [Turns to the page showing the barn, farmhouse, and corn field]

**Jamie:** And a house!

**Ben:** Maybe the farmer goes there.

**Maria:** So, what Cali is asking is, do the people—the farmer—do they know that the raccoons are eating their corn?

**James:** [Hands on his head] Eeeiii! They did it at night! He's [the farmer] gonna be mad!

“Eeeiii!” Is exactly right. We had talked about the raccoons and their habits and motives, but had not considered the raccoons’ antics through the perspectives of the farmer.

In offering **feedback**, be sure to highlight the ways the note—and the student’s voice—lifted the meaning making, and encourage children to continue to use writing to record their ideas. *We’re fortunate that Cali captured her thinking on a sticky note yesterday. If she hadn’t, we might have never even thought about the farmer and what he was thinking. Thank you, Cali! Don’t forget to use these notes any time you have new thoughts to add.*

## Facilitative Language Shifts

Growing children’s understanding of hearing all voices shifts the focus from compliance and turn taking to helping children understand the power of their own voices, and the importance of drawing in others. The process of **focus**, **facilitate**, and **feedback** teaches children to actively seek a range of voices and perspectives in their conversations. We first pose questions such as, *Who haven’t we heard from?* and *Who else could you talk to?*, but slowly our children come to own these language moves, developing habits for thinking and talking together purposefully and independently.

The chart in Figure 4.1 highlights some simple language shifts discussed in this chapter to help as we facilitate conversations. These subtle shifts send important messages about whose voices are valued, and they also position children to take more and more responsibility for inviting others into their talk (see the far-right column).



## Facilitative Language Shifts For Hearing All Voices

Instead of saying . . .	Try saying this . . .
<i>I think . . .</i> <i>I noticed . . .</i> <i>I want to know . . . Who can tell me . . . ?</i>	<i>[silence]</i> <i>Hmmm . . .</i>
<i>____, it's your turn now.</i>	<i>I'm noticing shaking/nodding heads . . . what are you thinking?</i> <i>I'm seeing frowns/grins/puzzled looks . . . what are you thinking?</i>
<i>Who knows how/why/when . . . ?</i>	<i>Who has a thought?</i> <i>Is anyone wondering . . . ?</i> <i>Why/how might . . . ?</i> <i>Hmmmm . . .</i>
<i>My question is . . .</i> <i>Now, my next question is . . .</i>	<i>What has you curious?</i> <i>What are you wondering?</i> <i>Your thinking has me wondering . . .</i>
<i>This one's hard. Let me explain . . .</i>	<i>Take a few minutes to think and talk this through with your partner.</i>
<i>____, it's your turn now.</i> <i>I'm sorry ____, you've already spoken three times.</i>	<i>I'm curious about how a new voice might shift our thinking. Does anyone want to add in a question, tentative wondering, or idea?</i> <i>Whose ideas have changed your thinking? Let's invite more of their thinking.</i>
<i>OK, we've decided that this book is about . . .</i>	<i>As you keep thinking about this, be sure to add your new ideas or questions to our chart. Then, we can revisit our thinking to grow it further.</i>

**Figure 4.1** Facilitative Language Shifts for Hearing All Voices

What's the difference?	Transferring facilitation
Shifts responsibility for the thinking and talking from the teacher to the children. Offers children space to think a bit, and sets the tone of the talk itself.	<i>Are you noticing what happens when we take a minute just to think?</i>
Shifts from cold-calling on children with an emphasis on turn taking, to noticing and responding to nonverbal signs of thinking. Invitation is responsive to children's internal process, drawing them into the conversation in gentle ways.	<i>Are you noticing shaking/nodding heads? Are you wondering what they're thinking? How might you ask . . . ?</i>  <i>Look around the circle—are you seeing frowns/grins/puzzled looks? Are you wondering what they're thinking? How might you ask . . . ?</i>
Shifts from a search for answers to an invitation for tentative thinking, which opens the conversation to a greater range of ideas and voices.	<i>Who might have a thought? How might you ask . . . ?</i>  <i>Are you curious about the wondering in people's heads? How might you ask . . . ?</i>
Shifts from the teacher as the asker of predetermined questions to sincere, responsive questions from both teacher and students. Frames curiosity and wonder as critical parts of the construction of meaning.	<i>Are you curious about the wondering in people's heads? How might you ask . . . ?</i>  <i>What does their thinking get you wondering about? How might you ask . . . ?</i>
Offers partner support for challenging ideas. Shows a belief in children's own strategic process to take on and talk through challenging ideas.	<i>Remember, if you need partner talk time to talk things through, let us know.</i>
Shifts from teacher control of turn taking or an expectation of quiet voices finding their own way into a conversation to a process that supports and encourages them to add their voices.  Shifts from extrinsic control of turn taking for our "talk early, talk often" children to helping them learn the potential of other voices and strategies needed for inviting them. Focuses children on the evolution of their thinking, emphasizing comprehension as an ongoing process.	<i>Is there anyone you need to invite into the conversation?</i>  <i>Hmmm . . . I wonder how that thought is settling with everyone. Try inviting a few people into the conversation to find out!</i>  <i>It looks like ____ has some thinking. How might you ask him/her about it?</i>
Shifts from comprehension as a finite process with a clear ending, to a process of comprehending that's ongoing.  Offers more reticent children a tool for adding their thinking to the conversation.	<i>How might you keep these ideas growing?</i>