

Organizing Class Discussions with a Talk Frame

Summary: Class discussions are a major part of most classrooms, but there can be a disconnect from the discussion to the individual response portion of the lesson. In an article for *Teaching Children Mathematics*, a third-grade teacher and a University of Connecticut professor discuss a tool for organizing class discussions, using a symmetry lesson as an example.

Practical Applications

The tool described by the authors is called a “talk frame,” and it is designed to help organize the results of class discussions before sending students off to write individual responses. It has the benefit of giving students a jumping-off and reference point for their reflections as well as giving the teacher a strong sense of the general level of understanding among his or her students. The talk frame is a “interactive graphic organizer that tracks the development of ideas on the board as students reason through a significant mathematical question.” It has three components that the class fills out together:

1. “Think”: Rewrite the question using student words
2. “Talk ideas”: Record all student ideas, both those that are correct and those that are incorrect
3. “We understand”: Summarize the class’ conclusion (ensure it is the correct conclusion)

The key to using the talk frame effectively is teacher facilitation. For instance, in the symmetry lesson one of the authors taught, which involved pictures of a leaf, “My students immediately began telling me that the dotted line on the leaf was not symmetrical. However, I asked them to consider whether the leaf was still symmetrical despite the fact that the line [drawn on the picture they were using] was not a line of symmetry. I focused on the question that required them to reason about different ways to justify their ideas about symmetry fro the talk frame ... together, they decided that the question ‘Is the Leaf Symmetrical?’ would be the ‘Think’ question.”

After creating the talk frame together, students were given time to individually answer questions about the leaf’s symmetry. The talk frame was left on the board. This way, the teacher could assess student mastery by whether they simply copied ideas from the talk frame or whether they were able to synthesize and extend the ideas – and, indeed, many students were able to do just that.

Conclusion and Citation

When leading a class discussion about a math topic, consider using a talk frame as a way to gauge student understanding and give students a reference point from which to draw deeper conclusions about the math involved when they move on to individual work.

Casa, T. & Williams, M. “Connecting Class Talk with Individual Student Writing.” *Teaching Children Mathematics*, (Dec. 2011), pp. 314-321. <http://bit.ly/vOzhev> (subscription only).