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classrooms still use recitation where students learn to repeat what others have decided is important to know. The teacher asks the question, the student responds, and the teacher acknowledges whether the response is right or wrong. Often this type of instruction is accompanied by sets of questions aligned with Bloom's taxonomy. This approach requires that students acquire lower-order skills before being allowed to grapple with higher-order skills. Current research does not support this view. Studies show that students in average and low-performing schools were not only able to participate in high-level discussions, but their progress was also greater compared to peers who were not taught this discussion method (Resnick, et al., 2015).

Using *Accountable Talk* practices to build the mind

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Children are born with the innate capacity to reason beginning at a very young age (Carey, 2009; Gopnik and Wellman, 2012; Spelke and Kinzler, 2007). Very young children build explanatory systems—implicit theories—that organize their knowledge. These theories enable children to predict, explain, and reason about relevant phenomena and, in some cases, intervene to change them. For over 20 years, the Institute for Learning (IFL) has championed that the process of socializing

intelligence takes place in and through talk. The IFL defines intelligence as much more than an innate ability to think quickly and stockpile bits of information. We believe intelligence is a set of problem-solving and reasoning capabilities, along with the habits of thinking that lead one to use those capabilities regularly. It is also a set of beliefs about one's right and obligation to understand and make sense of the world and one's capacity to figure things out over time (Resnick, 2010). Intelligent habits of mind are learned through daily expectations placed on the learner. By calling on students to use the skills of intelligent thinking, and by holding them responsible for doing

so, educators can help develop students' minds.

With this kind of robust evidence, it seems obvious that schools and school districts would foster the type of talk that promotes problem solving and reasoning. When educators set higher goals for every student, they can use classroom talk to teach students to think and make knowledge. The IFL uses the term Accountable Talk® practices for this kind of discourse. Using *Accountable Talk* practices with integrity for at least 90 minutes a week can produce powerful learning resulting in growth in demanding accountability systems (Resnick, 2019).

We need to make clear that most

Accountable Talk practices, when carried out with integrity, include every student in the class and do not exclude English learners or students in special education. In fact, these students show the greatest progress in learning and achievement when they participate in discussions using high-leverage practices that include *Accountable Talk* practices (Matsumura, Garnier, & Spybrook, 2013).

So let's get down to the serious question of what it really means to implement *Accountable Talk* practices with integrity. In classrooms where *Accountable Talk* practices are evident, every learner has a right and an obligation to participate in advancing the learning of others. Students wrestle with ideas and move back and forth through

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Lauren Resnick, co-author and founder of the Institute for Learning.

Accountable Talk practices

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the learning process. Students freely explore ideas and express their understanding using their own language. “Ultimately, through participating in *Accountable Talk*, students learn to reason their way toward understanding. Reasoning—processing, interpreting, and being able to do something new with information—is the way we solve problems in the adult world. Instead of passively allowing some students to learn these skills by accident, schools can teach them deliberately, by changing the way talk occurs in the classroom.” (Resnick, Asterhan, and Clarke, 2018)

Below are a few brief ideas that can get talk started at the beginning of the year. For a deeper discussion of *Accountable Talk* practices, we encourage all to read “Accountable Talk: Instructional dialogue that builds the mind” by Resnick, Asterhan, and Clarke (2018). Take a look at an [Accountable Talk discussion in action](#).

If you’re interested in producing robust learning in content and in argumentation, don’t leave the students’ potential to grow on your list of things to do when you have time. Spend at least 90 minutes a week growing your practice to orchestrate classroom discussions where every student can maximize potential. It’s their right and necessary to bring equity to the education of every student.

Setting Norms for Talk

Accountable Talk practices are not just about being civil. They are about knowing how to respond when there is disagreement. They require returning to texts repeatedly to find evidence to support claims and the ability to be unsure but willing to talk through uncertainty. Educators foster these skills by asking students to explain how they arrived at conclusions, provide evidence from texts for their responses, and ask one another to defend their responses. Educators need to explicitly set norms that make it not only acceptable but also expected for students to debate one another. Students should expect others to ask them how they arrived at answers and why they came to particular conclusions.

Including Everyone

Some students may struggle in making their explanations, and others may even need to make some of the explanations in a language other than English. It is the quality of the argument that is important, not the form used to express the thinking. This is important to remember if equity is a goal for your teaching. Be prepared to scaffold without diminishing the rigor of the discussion.

Designing Cognitively Demanding Tasks and Selecting Complex Texts

Tasks need to be designed to ask students to reason, explain, and

elaborate on their thinking—the cognitive processes that support knowledge building. If educators want students to grapple with challenging ideas, those ideas have to be present in the text. Texts without them are not worthy of the kinds of robust discussions at the center of *Accountable Talk* practices. Educators need the opportunity to select complex, culturally relevant texts and to analyze and discuss them with colleagues so students have access to materials critical to building new ideas and think through authentic problems.

Writing Questions That Invite Talk

Questions that involve simple recall and have only one right answer don’t lead to deeply engaged discussions. Educators need to develop questions that allow students to explore a variety of ideas and possible solutions. This may take time and can sometimes be frustrating for students and teachers alike. It helps for educators to try to answer their own questions prior to inviting students to respond. If the educator cannot think of more than two or three possible responses to a question, that’s a sign that the question should be adjusted to allow for more ideas and multiple possible correct answers. ■

Improvement science

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Teachers’ next action, which they plan to focus on in the upcoming school year, is to scribe classroom discussions when implementing a high-level task using a rigorous and engaging text. The purpose is two-fold: (1) to collect classroom data in order to analyze the quality of talk based on rigorous questions and (2) to find authentic examples of talk moves that students use regardless of chosen dialect. For example, instead of a student saying, “I’d like to add on to what Andrew said,” a student may say, “I feel Andrew because...” Both statements work to link contributions regardless of the exact words that students say during the discussion. These examples of student talk moves will be used to refine the [Accountable Talk® Moves and Function tool](#) used in Schenectady High School. Our working hypothesis is that authentic examples of rigorous thinking will help illustrate that the talk stems are meant as entry points into conversations, but should not be used in formulaic or generic ways that don’t move the conversation forward in academically productive ways. Our hope is also that it helps students and teachers alike develop an understanding and respect for diversity in language use. ■

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Content matters

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and #3 align with features of *Accountable Talk* discussions, and only #3 illustrates how a student’s contribution can be recognized and leveraged to create opportunities for rigorous thinking about a mathematical relationship for everyone in the community.

When we consider the impact a response to a student contribution has on the discussion, we can gain insight into the complexity of facilitating *Accountable Talk* discussions. When thinking about and reflecting on the “in the moment” decisions during classroom discussions, it is helpful to consider if the move pro-

vides students greater entry into the discussion, holds them to accuracy of their claims and thinking, and/or sets up opportunities to discuss mathematical relationships. Because there is no one way of facilitating an *Accountable Talk* discussion, it is incumbent upon all of us to be critical friends and colleagues. Through collaborative and engaged discussions with colleagues about our pedagogical choices, and with honest self-reflection, we can move toward providing more rigorous and equitable learning environments and instruction for every student. ■

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