

Ask, Don't Tell

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“...there are hidden costs in telling people things. If students can figure something out for themselves, explicitly providing the information preempts the students' opportunity to build a sense of agency and independence.

When you figure out something for yourself there is a certain thrill . . . you might start to think that figuring things out is something that you can actually do.

When you are told something... it feels different.”

Johnston, P. (2004) *Choice Words*. p. 8

- During word study students compare and contrast sounds within words and the spelling patterns that represent pronunciations and meaning.
- Word sorting provides a context in which children can be engaged in thoughtful analysis and problem solving.
- Thoughtful analysis occurs only when teachers carefully consider the language they use with students

Readers Theater

- Listen to the nature of the talk during two word study lessons.
- Be ready to share observations
- What seems effective or ineffective?

bone	box	boat
drop	drove	soap
gone	nose	lock
toast	joke	rope
block	love	load
gone	rose	rode
road	rod	chop

Teacher A = IRE

The **initiate-Response-Evaluate** (IRE) model is a teacher lead question and answer session.

I: The teacher asks a question (often there is only one right answer)

R: A student is selected to answer the question.

E: Then the teacher evaluates the response as correct: *Good! Right! Excellent!* Or incorrect: *No, does someone else have an idea? No, the answer is*

- Even when a higher order question is asked the teacher may only accept one answer. When the expected answer is given, further discussion is shut down.
- The result is more of an inquisition than a discussion
- The IRE model positions teachers as the authority and positions students as the passive recipients of information who seek teacher approval – not as independent problem solvers

Take a Closer Look -Introducing the Sort

Teacher A

T: This week we are going to be sorting words with long and short o. Let's read over them to be sure you know them all.

ALL: Read quickly through the words in the sort.

Teacher B

T: Let's take a look at the words for this week and see what you notice about them. Use your eyes and ears.

Jess: They all have o's.

T: You are using your eyes aren't you? What else?

Greg: Some have the short-o sound.

T: Give us an example.

Greg: Spot

T: So some have short-o sounds. What about the others?

Vince: Some have oooh?

Greg: Yeah, like float.

Continued . . .

Addressing Errors

Teacher A

Jess: Joke has a short - o.

T: Listen, j-ooooo-ke. Do you hear the vowel say it's name?

Jess: Yes

T: So it is a long-o.

Teacher B

Jess: Joke will go under boat. T: Why?

Jess It has the short-o sound.

T: Can you say it slowly so we hear that vowel sound?

Jess: joooke.

T: So is the vowel long or short?

Jess: Ooo - oh, that's long-o.

T: Hmmm, maybe we need to label these key words to keep us straight. I am going to write short-o above box and long-o above boat. Jess, back to you. Tell us again where will joke go and why?

Jess: Joke goes under boat because it has the long-o sound.

T: Did labeling the key words help? When you do your sort you might want to label your key words also. Who wants to try the next word?

Talk about the sort

Teacher A

T: (pointing to the short-o column) How are these words alike? Greg can you tell us?

Greg: They all have one o in the middle.

T: Yes, And what about the sound?

Greg: Short o

T: Excellent! Now what about this column? Vince we haven't heard from you.

Vince: They sound alike in the middle.

T: Yes, they all have the long-o sound.

Teacher B

T: Now that we have our words sorted, use your eyes and ears and turn and talk to a partner about what you notice.

All: murmur quietly.

T: Who is ready to share your ideas with the group.

Alexis: The words under box just have one o in the middle.

T: Tell me more.

Alexis: The words with one o in the middle have the short-o sound.

T: Would everyone agree with Alexis? What else?

Vince: Some of the words under boat have OA and some have a silent E at the end.

T: So you are looking at the spelling patterns in the words. Anyone else notice something?

Talking about oddballs

Teacher A

Sara: Gone. I think that is an oddball.

T: Good for you Sara. It doesn't have either the long or short sound. Listen G-AW-N. Watch out for another oddball in this sort.

Teacher B

Sara: Gone. I think that is an oddball.

T: Why is that?

Sara: The vowel sound is like /aw/ - gawn

T- It sounds different to me too. Does anyone say it differently? Sometimes we may not agree about how to pronounce words because we have a different dialect, but we seem to agree gone is an oddball in this sort.

More on oddballs

Greg: I know, I know, love is an oddball too.

T: Good job Greg!

Sara: The oddball love has a silent-e.

T: So what are you thinking?

Sara: Well, maybe it shouldn't be an oddball.

William: But it doesn't have the long-o sound.

Vince: Yeah, and what about gone?

T: So we have questions about some of the words. Let's sort the long-o words into two categories and then get back to this.

Follow up Talk

- *T: Let's look at those oddballs again. Why are they odd?*
- *Alexis: Because they don't have the right sound?*
- *T: OK Jess?*
- *Jess: They have e's at the end?*
- *T: Yes, They have e's at the end - but not the long-o sound.*

T: Now, let's go back to the oddballs. We had some questions about them.

Sara: They both have the e at the end.

T: So why don't we put them with the other CVCe words?

Alexis: Because they don't have the right sound?

T: Do you all agree?

Jesse: Yes, If you don't pay attention to the sound you might put them in the wrong place.

T: That's what will make them tricky, isn't it? They have the same pattern but not the same sound.

Drawing Conclusions

Teacher A

T: So today we have learned that long-o can be spelled two ways. Now it is your turn to sort -watch out for those oddballs!

Teacher B

T: So what did you learn from this sort to be a better reader or speller? Turn and talk with your partner for just a minute.

T: Ok, who has some ideas to share?

Greg: We learned that long-o has two patterns.

T: Go on

Greg: There are silent letters in both.

T: Anything else?

William: Short-o is just spelled with an o.

T: So would you all agree that the big idea for this sort is that long-o can be spelled two different ways (silent e and the oa pattern) while short-o is just spelled with one o?

Effective Teacher Talk

- Effective word study lessons involve students in analysis and position them as problem solvers.
- Let's summarize some things teachers should do to promote critical thinking and build student identity

The language we use...

- **Ask open-ended questions** such as *What do you notice about these words? How can we sort these words? How are they alike?*
- **Probes can push children to notice more** than one thing and suggests there are multiple aspects of words worth considering. *Anything else? What do the rest of you think?*
- **Avoid judgments:** *good, right, yes* – are all evaluative and cast the teacher as the authority to please. Try: *I noticed that also. Do you all agree? Tell me more.*

- **Affirm responses or suggest a process** students use independently in the future: *You are using your ears. Try saying that slowly. Would it help if ...*
- **Seek justification:** *Why? How did you know? How did you figure that out?*
- **Don't reach conclusions too quickly.** Encourage students' questions and return to them. *Let's go back to those words later. You may be right but let's sort first.*

- **Encourage flexibility:** *Can you sort another way? Who has another idea? What else can you try?*
- **Use errors as opportunities** by asking guiding questions, providing tips, and then help student “save face”: *Try saying it slowly. Try that again. That was tricky.*
- **Give students responsibility:** *Turn and talk. What did we learn today? I’m going to let you figure that out on your own. Watch for oddballs!*

Handouts

- See handout "Questions to Guide Critical Thinking about Word Study" for suggestions about different kinds of questions
- How to fit it all in? See handout "Continuum of Support for Introducing Word Study".
 - Teacher directed sorts devote the most time to discussion and include an introduction, sorting under supervision, checking and reflecting or summarizing in a small group.
 - Experienced sorters can sort independently, with a partner or in small groups and talk about the sort. They will be familiar with the types of questions asked by the teacher. The teacher may just check in later and ask for a summary of their discussion.

“Teaching is Not Telling”

William James 1958

Maybe then our discussions, our lessons, our research, and maybe our educational policies could move beyond debating what sort of lessons garner higher test scores, and instead, focus on how our lessons develop not just readers and writers but **literate citizens for a democratic society**

Richard Allington (Foreward to *Choice Words* by Peter Johnston)