

## **Reflections from Implementing an Instructional Focus: Student Ownership of Questioning and Discussion at P.S. 112**

Keren Zarom: Having a school focus of quality questioning and discussion and having our students really create conversations with each other and having teachers step out of the role really leads into lifelong skills that will lead into college and when they are working in a job.

Verena Valck: Discussion and questioning is the right focus for our school, because we've been at this for a very long time, meaning we started a few years ago talking about inquiry, and talking about how our children lacked academic vocabulary, which lead us into researching academic vocabulary and how to help our children improve academic vocabulary. It's been a journey and right now we're in the beginning stages of letting go, allowing them to run the classroom, run the discussions, and that's how we got there.

Eileen Reiter: We observed that our students did not have the academic vocabulary and oral language to have any kinds of conversations. It was mostly teacher questioning. The kids, they respond. It was very clear that we had to do something to develop oral language and vocabulary in the school.

Joann Ortiz: So, as a school, we look into the student's work, their assessments, conversations and activities and we start off by grade. We have conversations and study groups that leads to our year's focus.

Eileen Reiter: It's really about looking at each student individually and how we can help them and support them.

Keren Zarom: The more we can get our students to talk, to talk to each other, to listen, it carries across all academic areas. So we've really been planning on how to make math, science, reading, social studies all social, so that they are able to talk about things together.

Kelly Holland: The impact of children starting to talk more and having conversations is really academic across the grade. They get their thoughts out and then it gets also put into writing, so their writing volume has not just increased, but it makes more sense.

Eileen Reiter: We believe that having the focus of discussion and questioning has had a significant impact on our students' talk and making their thinking visible and we believe it's had an impact on their writing and, you know of course, speaking and listening and also in reading levels because it also deepens their comprehension. So we've really seen

shifts in the school and we've really looked at our data especially in reading. More of our kids are on or above grade level in the middle of the year, that's significant.

Verena Valck: It is hard, but it's 100% doable. The differences that I am seeing are that they own the classroom, they are not shy to participate, they are not nervous, they are not anxious, they are not worried that someone is going to laugh at them. They feel that their opinions are valid, all their opinions count, nobody is wrong, which for first graders is very hard to understand that there could be other perspectives besides their own.

Student: Looking is a part of listening. Everyone has different ideas and I can learn from everyone else and my teacher.

Verena Valck: I've seen a huge change not only in the amount of their verbal participation, but also in how they treat each other and relate to each other.