

Sometimes Silence Speaks Volumes

By Kathy King-Dickman | Categories: Uncategorized

In order to be a truly great facilitator or teacher, we don't need to have all the answers.

Spending two days with my colleagues Ashley, Taylor, and Jenny and experiencing their work with teachers from Grand Avenue Elementary was astounding. Not because of what they said, but more because of what they did not say. I was continually amazed at how many times they would answer a question with a prompt that encouraged the teachers to probe deeper and do their own thinking rather than simply provide the answers for them. As I listened to these fine mentors come up with great ideas on their own, they helped me I understood at a much deeper level something that I thought I always knew: In order to be a truly great facilitator or teacher, we don't need to have all the answers. In fact, it is probably more important to know when *not* to provide the answer.

The following prompts will work for learners from 5 to 95:

- "Tell me more about your thinking."
- "Who can add on to what ____ just said?"
- "Talk to your partner about..."
- "Could you say more about that?"
- "Do you agree or disagree with what ____ just said?"
- "What do you all think about what ____ just said?"
- "What in the text makes you think that?"
- and Ashley's favorite when asked a direct question: "That depends..."

When answers or advice are given to adolescents or teens they often tune us out. When answers are provided for small children they learn to let the adults do the thinking for them. On the other hand, when teachers, teens, or our smallest learners are allowed to make their own decisions and solve their own problems, they take ownership of their learning and their classrooms.

As Taylor and I debriefed about my lesson with kindergarteners, I realized that my next goal as a consultant supporting educators was the same as my goal for improving my practice with students: get the learners to think and discuss at deeper levels. This reminds me of something Cris Tovani, author of *I Read It, But Don't Get It* and *Do I Really Have to Teach Reading* says: "If we are more tired than our learners at the end of the day, something is wrong. The new Common Core State Standards are even pushing us to let the learners do the deep thinking work."

So please do not be upset if any of you get the chance to work with me in the near future and you leave my session exhausted. I am just trying to get *you* to do the thinking, whether you are 5 or 95.

Check out Kathy's article on the love of reading in Educational Leadership magazine here.