Math Perspectives
Teacher Development Center

Tips for Implementing Number Talks

Primary Grades

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- **Keep it short (5-15 minutes).**
- **Do it every day.**
- **Give the students a lot of practice with the same kinds of problems.**
- **Encourage sharing and clarify students' thinking by asking:**
  - How did you see it?
  - Who would like to share their thinking?
  - How did you figure it out?
  - What did you do next?
  - How did you think about that?
  - Who else used this strategy to solve the problem?
  - What strategies do you see being used?
  - Which strategies seem to be efficient for this problem?
- **Teach intentionally:**
  - Choose related sequences of cards/problems.
  - Focus students' thinking:
    - See if you can . . .?
    - How many will there be if . . .?
    - What if . . . ?
    - Can you use what you know about the last card/problem to help you think about . . .?
  - Encourage students to "think first" and then check with models, if needed.
  - Chart the students' thinking.
  - Keep it interesting by not always being predictable.
- **Create a safe and supportive environment.**
  - Accept answers without praise or criticism.
  - Allow students to ask questions of each other.
  - Encourage students to listen to each other.
  - Encourage students to self-correct.

- **Name/label the strategies that students use.**
    - Counting
    - Counting on
    - Counting by . . .
    - Making a "10"
    - Breaking apart numbers
    - Using what they already know
    - Starting with the 10s
    - Using doubles and doubles + or –
    - Using a model
    - Using landmark numbers
    - Relating to money

- **Vary the Number Talk to meet the range of needs.**
    - Vary the setting of the Number Talk.
        - Whole group
        - Small group
    - Vary the sharing strategies used.
        - Share whole group
        - Share with neighbors
    - Vary the materials within a Number Talk.
        - Dot cards
        - Toothpick cards
        - Pattern Block Cards
        - Tile Cards
        - Number Shape cards
        - Unifix Towers
        - Ten Frames
    - Vary the level of difficulty within a Number Talk.
        - Use "meaningful flashcards."
        - Use written problems.
        - Use smaller numbers.
        - Relate to larger numbers.

- **When planning or implementing a Number Talk, consider the following:**
    - Do the students have facility with numbers to 6? To 10? To 20?
    - How do they get their answers?
    - Can they use what they know for related problems?
    - How well can they verbalize their thinking?
    - Are their errors way off, or are they reasonable?

- **The goal of Number Talks is "computational fluency" (accuracy, efficiency and flexibility). We want to focus students' attention so they will move from:**
    - figuring out the answers any way they can to . . .
    - becoming more efficient at figuring out answers to . . .
    - just knowing or using efficient strategies.