
Learning to Speak as Scholars: Academic conversations in the primary grades



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Objectives:

- Reflect on the current research by Zwiers and how it has informed practice.
- Explain the order of implementation of the original five core communication skills and the revised four skills.
- View and analyze oral language of primary grade students and assess progress over time.
- Adapt this approach to meet the needs of your own students.

What are academic conversations?

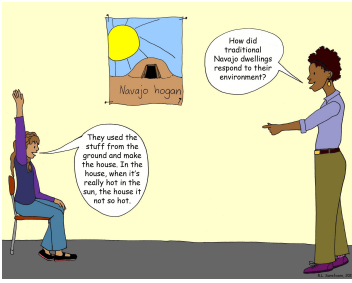


Kid-friendly definitions:

academic = things that have to do with school and learning
conversation = when you take turns talking with a partner

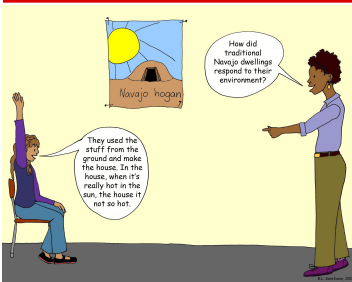
- Academic conversations are back-and-forth dialogues in which students focus on a topic and explore it by building, challenging, and negotiating relevant ideas.
- Based on the research of Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford (2011).
- Developed for ELLs, valuable for all students.

Why academic conversations?



- Builds academic language, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills
- Promotes different perspectives and empathy
- Fosters skills for negotiating meaning and focusing on a topic
- Builds academic identity and student voice

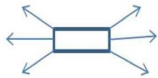
Why academic conversations?



- Cultivates connections
- Helps students to co-construct understandings
- Builds relationships
- Develops inner dialogue and self-talk
- Fosters engagement and motivation

5 Core Communication Skills (Older model)

Elaborate and Clarify



Support Ideas with Examples
(from this text, other texts, the world, and life)



Paraphrase



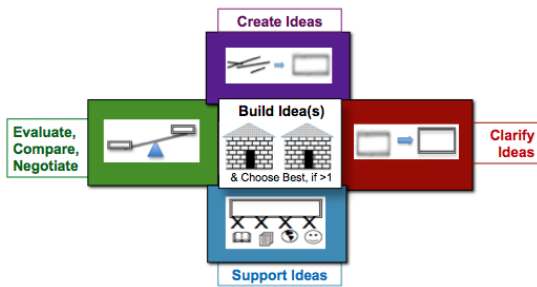
Build On / Challenge a Partner's Idea



Synthesize



4 Core Communication Skills (New)



Criteria for Effective Prompts (New)

1. Engaging and authentic purpose. We talk to get things done.
2. Clear and focused prompt. Beyond typical school tasks and has real world adaptations.
3. Opportunities to use original, complex language. Refine with partner's help.
4. Builds on background knowledge and skills.

Effective Prompts

Ineffective Prompts	Effective Prompts
Talk about the book.	How did the main character act bravely?
Describe the polar bear.	How do structural adaptations help the polar bear to survive in its habitat?
Where do you like to hide?	Where is the best place to hide? Why?

Kindergarten Adaptations

Upper Grades

- 4 core communication skills
- discuss abstract concepts
- debate controversial ideas
- more immediate transfer to literacy
- reminder sheets
- modeling

Lower Grades

- focus on elaboration and paraphrasing
- discussions focus on more concrete concepts
- prompts are open-ended questions (describe, how, why)
- manipulatives (chips, building blocks)
- modeling

Prioritizing Skills for Primary Grades

1. **What is an academic conversation?**

2. **Elaborate** (*Count conversational points with blue chips.*)

3. **Paraphrase** (*Turn over 2-sided chip when paraphrasing what a partner has said.*)



Formative Assessment: Listening in on conversations

1. Code your discourse sample by highlighting areas where students could benefit from instruction
 - a. Vocabulary usage (word, phrase level)
 - b. Language forms and conventions (sentence level)
 - c. Linguistic complexity (discourse/message level)- can include evidence of AC skills (paraphrasing, elaborating, supporting with examples, building on or challenging ideas, synthesizing)
2. What is her most pressing need?
3. What instruction will you plan?

Video: May 5, 2015

How is the pumpkin life cycle similar to the life cycle of grass? How are they different?





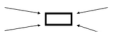







Conversation Analysis Tool

1. Students take appropriate turns to construct a conversation.
2. Turns build on previous statements to create a clear and complete idea.
3. Turns focus on content and skills related to objectives.
 - a. Strong evidence
 - b. Inconsistent evidence
 - c. Attempting
 - d. No attempt

Rubrics for Assessment



In our academic conversation did we...		Sometimes	Often
make eye contact and listen?	 		
paraphrase?			
elaborate and tell more?			

Suggest a change that you and your partner could make to have a better conversation next time:

Brainstorm Ideas for Your Classroom/School

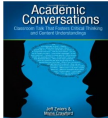
What could your students discuss in math, reading, writing, science? What adaptations could you make for your students' success?





Resources

Where can I find more information?



Free Online Courses from Stanford University:

- *Constructive Classroom Conversations: Mastering Language for College and Career Readiness*
- *Seven Essential Practices for Developing Academic Oral Language and Literacy in Every Subject*

<http://online.stanford.edu/courses/platform/NovoEd>

Academic Language Development Network: <http://aldnetwork.org/>

Academic Language and Literacy: <http://www.jeffzwiers.org/>

Understanding Language (Stanford University): <http://ell.stanford.edu/>

Questions?