Academic Conversations

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| **Conversation Builds Vocabulary (LL)**  -Using vocabulary in academic discourse is vital for lasting learning. The process of making words fit new ideas makes the word stick in the brain.  -When teachers compared the words used in conversation to those just learned from quizzes, they found that using new words in authentic conversation increased students’ long term learning of them.  -In authentic conversation, a word becomes a familiar tool to build ideas rather than just to memorize. |

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| **Conversation Builds Literacy Skills (LL)**  -Conversation helps readers develop vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge and thinking skills that authors expect readers to have.  -The language that happens in each person’s head is the main set of tools for constructing meaning from texts for **writing**  -In conversation, questions and inferences about the text are often explored and answered, and, as a result, **comprehension** of the text improves. |

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| **Conversation Builds Oral Language and Communication Skills (LL)**  -Oral language is less emphasized after third grade. Yet, the ability to listen, express, and build meaning with others form a cornerstone for learning.  **Communication Skills** include leaning toward your partner when conversing; making eye contact; using gestures and facial expressions to understanding or puzzlement; and turn taking.  **Additional skills and values that conversations can foster:**   * *Argumentation skills -* students learn how to compare what they are hearing from their partner with what they themselves are thinking and how to formulate the next response. They practice how to come to an agreement (or agreeing or disagreeing) and synthesize their ideas. * *Group Discussion Skills* - conversation foster more student ownership of a group and whole-class discussions. * *Listening* - Student listening skills sharpen when they listen to a partner and are expected to respond (teachers can time students..talk for a minute..partner listens without interruption….Partner sums-up with their partner said… *I heard you say…)* * *Valuing talk and clarity -* They learn that talk is a powerful way to connect with others, to value them, and to understand the world |

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| **Conversation Builds Critical Thinking Skills (COG)**  **-**Several skills that help students engage in academic tasks are recognizing and solving problems, inferencing and predicting, gathering relevant information, interpreting themes and motives, evaluating evidence, comparing, seeing multiple perspectives, recognizing bias and ethical issues, applying ideas and skills to novel situations, and analyzing patterns and relationships. |

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| **Conversation Builds Different Perspectives and Empathy (COG)**  -Text focused teaching in school and a texting-gaming-watching-TV culture outside of school tend to lower the chances for students to share and learn perspectives at more personal levels.  -A student can learn from every other classmates’s opinions, experiences, and ways of thinking.  -In order to value perspectives:   * I need to care about what you think and I need to believe that it is as valuable as what I think. To do this well, I need to listen. I need to step into your past and present shoes to consider what you feel. I need to empathize. Teachers need to model how to listen and to empathize (videos...short clips) |

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| **Conversation Fosters Creativity (COG)**  **-**Conversations can be designed with stages of creativity in mind: define the issue; do need research; brainstorm possible solutions |

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| **Behaviors of Effective Conversations**  **-Appropriate eye contact** -students should not be looking down or away...and not starting at each other  **-Facing one another-** face each other with whole body  **-Attentive posture**-leaning toward your partner  **-Nodding head to show understanding**  **-Appropriate gesturing** (do not roll eyes or look bored)  -students should be encouraged to smile, look surprised, show interest  -use “keep talking” tactics (Uh huh, wow, interesting, hmm, okay, I see, Go on, Really? Seriously?)  -Silence (to allow thinking time to put into thoughts into words)  -Prosody (changing voice tone, pitch, volume, and emphasis)  -Interrupting (by agreeing, asking for clarification, or using nonverbal signals) |

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| **Reflections for Teachers**   1. Think of challenges that might occur as you try to implement more conversation in your classes. 2. Think of possible topics in your discipline that could be used as cases to discuss and build conversation 3. Consider the thinking skills that you would like to emphasize when introducing academic conversations. 4. Think of two students and write an ideal conversation between them. Think about what you want them to think about, say, and emphasize. 5. Hold conversations with other adults about texts, news events, and meaningful topics. Reflect on how the conversation developed, veered, or stagnated. 6. Which skills, behaviors, or attitudes do you need to work on? |