Conversation Cues

Overview

What are Conversation Cues?

Conversation Cues[1] are questions teachers can ask students to promote productive and equitable conversation, based on four goals:

- Goal 1: encourage all students to talk and be understood;
- Goal 2: listen carefully to one another and seek to understand;
- Goal 3: deepen thinking; and
- Goal 4: think with others to expand the conversation.

Across the year, Conversation Cues are introduced one goal at a time. In this context, Conversation Cues slowly build the capacity for all students to engage in rich, collaborative discussions targeted at CCSS standards, thus helping to level the playing field and establish equity. Ample opportunity for productive and equitable conversation is an important part of the process of acquiring literacy skills for any student. For English language learners, these conversations are also critical to overall language acquisition.

Goal 1 Conversation Cues are a good place to begin promoting both productivity and equity because they help ensure students have ample think-time and encourage students to voice their thinking. Therefore, Goal 1 helps sets the stage for deeper Goals 2–4 Conversation Cues later in the year. Since a primary goal of Goal 1 Conversation Cues is to allow time for students to think and write or sketch before they respond, consider providing students with a thinking journal or scrap paper. (Assure students that this paper will not be graded; however, consider inviting students to track their notes as a way to gauge the progress of their conversation and thinking skills.)

In Grades K–2, various charts supporting collaboration and conversation are posted according to the needs of the module lessons. Select Conversation Cues are embedded into these charts at strategic points for student use. In Grades 3–5, select Conversation Cues are gradually embedded into the Discussion Norms anchor chart posted throughout the module lessons for student use.

See the table below for the complete set of Conversation Cues. (This table may be printed for teacher reference throughout the year.)

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[1] Conversation Cues are adapted from Michaels, Sarah and O'Connor, Cathy. *Talk Science Primer*. Cambridge, MA: TERC, 2012. http://inquiryproject.terc.edu/shared/pd/TalkScience_Primer.pdf. Based on Chapin, S., O'Connor, C., and Anderson, N. [2009]. *Classroom Discussions: Using Math Talk to Help Students Learn, Grades K–6*. Second Edition. Sausalito, CA: Math Solutions Publications.)

Modeling Productive and Equitable Conversations

To maximize Conversation Cues, particularly Goals 3 and 4, consider modeling productive and equitable conversations with a student volunteer before releasing students to have their own conversations. Reinforce the model conversation by displaying it, including possible questions and responses. Consider this sample Kindergarten Goal 3 conversation, which might occur in Module 2, Unit 2, Lesson 10:

Teacher to class: "Let's think about our focus question. How does this sentence help us understand how the changing weather affects Tess and Mamma?"

[Teacher displays focus question: How does this Language Dive sentence help us understand how the changing weather affects Tess and Mamma?]

Teacher to class: "Before you talk with your partner, your classmate and I will model the conversation. This conversation frame can help us."

[Teacher displays conversation frame:

   A. "How does this Language Dive sentence help you understand how the changing weather affects Tess and Mamma?"

   B. "The sentence helped me understand the focus question because _____. How does the sentence help you understand how the changing weather affects Tess and Mamma?"

   C. "It helps me understand that _____."

   D. "I agree/disagree. I'd like to add that _____."]

[Teacher and volunteer point to the conversation frame on display as they model.]

Volunteer to teacher: "How does this sentence help you understand how the changing weather affects Tess and Mamma?"

Teacher to volunteer: "The sentence helped me understand the focus question because I now know that the rain makes Tess and Mamma feel happy. How does the sentence help you understand how the changing weather affects Tess and Mamma?"

Volunteer to teacher: "It helps me understand that rain made Tess and Mamma feel better because they were too hot and tired."

Teacher to volunteer (listening carefully): "Sorry, I'm not sure I understood that. Could you please repeat what you said?"

Volunteer to teacher: "Sure! It helps me understand that, before the rain, Tess and Mamma were so hot and tired. And then the cool rain made them feel better."

Teacher to volunteer: "Oh, yes. I agree. I'd like to add on that we know they feel better because they were jumping around."

Teacher to class: "Now, I will give you time to think and discuss with a partner. You can use the conversation frame on display if you want help."

Conversation Cues	
Cue	**Expected Response**
Goal 1: Help all students talk and be understood (introduced Module 1, Unit 1)	
Think and process language internally	
"I'll give you time to think and write or sketch." "I'll give you a minute to think and write or sketch." "I'll give you time to discuss this with a partner."	
Elaborate upon or expand	
"Can you say more about that?" "Can you give an example?"	*"Sure. I think that _____."* *"OK. One example is _____."*
Clarify	
So, do you mean _____?"	*"You've got it."* *"No, sorry, that's not what I mean. I mean _____."*
Goal 2: Help students listen carefully to one another and seek to understand (introduced Module 1, Unit 3)	
Repeat or paraphrase	
"Who can repeat what your classmate said?" "Who can tell us what your classmate said in your own words?"	*"She said _____."* *"He was saying that _____."*
Goal 3: Help students deepen their thinking (introduced Module 2, Unit 2)	
Provide reasoning or evidence	
"Why do you think that?" "What, in the (sentence/text), makes you think so?"	*"Because _____."* *"If you look at _____, it says _____, which means _____."*
Challenge thinking	
"What if _____ (that word were removed/the main character had done something different/we didn't write an introduction)? I'll give you time to think and discuss with a partner." "Can you figure out why _____(the author used this phrase/we used that strategy/there's an -ly added to that word)? I'll give you time to think and discuss with a partner."	*"If we did that, then _____."* *"I think it's because _____."*
Think about thinking (metacognition)	
"What strategies/habits helped you succeed? I'll give you time to think and discuss with a partner." "How does our discussion add to your understanding of _____ (previously discussed topic/text/language)? I'll give you time to think and discuss with a partner."	*"_____ helped me a lot because _____."* *"I used to think that _____, and now I think that _____."*

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Goal 4: Help students think with others to expand the conversation (introduced Module 3, Unit 1)	
Compare	
"How is what _____ said the same as/different from what _____ said?"	*"_____ said _____. That's different from what _____ said because _____."*
Agree, disagree, and explain why	
"Do you agree or disagree with what your classmate said? Why?"	*"I agree/disagree because _____."* *"I think what he said is _____ because _____."*
Add on	
"Who can add on to what your classmate said?"	*"I think that _____."*
Explain	
"Who can explain why your classmate came up with that response?"	*"I think what she's saying is _____."*