



What Student Conversations Can Show Us

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

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Understanding Language | Language, Literacy, & Learning in the Content Areas

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Overview

- I. Research on Conversations
- II. Formative Assessment Lenses
- III. Assessment as Learning
- IV. Action Research



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The Power of Conversation

In the Bantu language, the word *ubuntu* means that a person becomes a person only through other people.

Neuroscientists agree, arguing that our brains and minds are shaped in continuous interaction with other people.

During conversation, participants orient towards the other person's mind, inferring meanings and relevancies, rather than just decoding the verbal messages.



(Hari & Kujala, 2007. *Brain Basis of Human Social Interaction: From Concepts to Brain Imaging*)

I. Educational Research on Conversations

1. **Challenges:** Not enough (especially paired)
Messy (lots of variables) & takes time
2. **What do we want to know?**
3. **Research *tends to* tell us that conversations* improve:**
 - Writing
 - Test scores
 - Content/text understandings (RT)
 - Thinking skills (Collab. Argu.)
 - Language (WL)
1. **Formative assessment is vital**



II. Formative Assessment Lenses

CONTENT

How well do students:

- Understand concepts/relationships?
- Use relevant ideas & evidence?

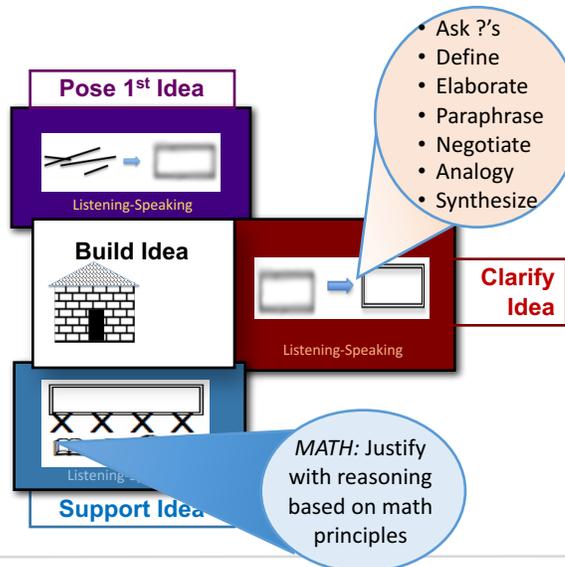
CONVERSATION SKILLS

How well do students:

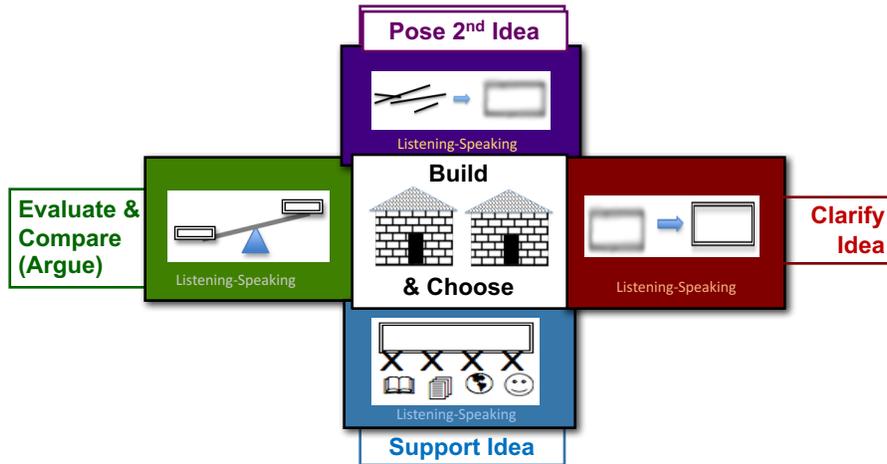
- Use key skills within turns to build and argue ideas?



Constructive Conversation Skills (Build one Idea)



Constructive Conversation Skills (Collaborative Argument)



II. Formative Assessment Lenses

CONTENT

How well do students:

- Understand concepts/relationships?
- Use relevant ideas & evidence?

CONVERSATION SKILLS

How well do students:

- Use the skills within turns to build and argue ideas?

THINKING:

How well do students:

- Use thinking skills they need to address the prompt/purpose

LANGUAGE

How well do students:

- Use words, sentences, organization, & nonverbals to describe & use all these things

Empathy, Agency, Engagement, ?

Conversation 1 – 2nd gr. SS

1A: What do firefighters need most? (*prompt*)

2B: Air.

3A: Can you give an example?

4B: Like a tank of air like the picture.

5A: Why do they need it most?

6B: So they won't die.

7A: Why?

8B: When they go in burned buildings. Smoke kills so they need air. Air is most important.

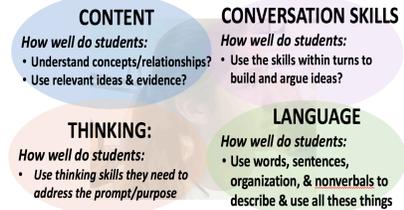
9A: I think they need water most.

10B: Why?

11A: They need it to put out the fire. That's what they do.

12B: But they can't use the water if they die from smoke.

13A: OK, yeah. Air is most important.



Conversation 2 – 3rd Gr. Science

Elia: So, how and why do animals evolve?
(*prompt on the board*)

Alex: To live.

Elia: What's an example? (*prompt on board*)

Alex: Sharks.

Elia: What's another example?

Alex: Turtles.

Elia: What's another example?

Alex: Giraffes. They got long necks.

Elia: Why?

Alex: To reach up into trees.

Elia: OK, let's write these down.



Conversation 3 – 5th Gr. ELD



Context

- ELD class
- Had read *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*

This Clip

- After reading *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, students discuss whether the wolf was guilty or not.

Conversation 4 – 4th gr. Science

A: I think all cars should be electric.

B: Why?

A: Cuz gas cars pollute the air.

B: How do you know?

A: I read it.

B: Read what?

A: Gas cars makes our planet get hotter.

B: Oh yeah, like something like gases and a greenhouse.

A: What's a greenhouse?

B: Like a glass house that gets hot cuz its all glass. Plants grow in it.

A: What about the other side? (looks at notes) It's gas cars are OK.

B: They go more miles.

A: What do you mean?

B: Electric cars don't go far as gas ones, like/

A: /And filling up with gas is less time than recharge it.

B: And it's easier to find gas stations than recharge stations.

A: So one is better for the world, and one is easier. Which?



Conversation 5 – 4th Gr. History (Beginning Levels of Proficiency)

Learning objective: Use reasons to argue the importance of a historical figure.

Prompt: Talk about what makes Abraham Lincoln a hero.

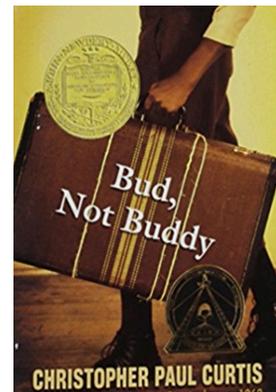
- A: How Lincoln a hero?
 B: He stop slavery, the slaves.
 A: How?
 B: The war.
 A: He foughted to stop slavery.
 B: Muchos (many) died in the war.
 A: Very bad.
 B: But slavery is more bad. Lincoln is hero.
 A: He won the war. They were free.



Conversation 6 - 5TH ELA

Teacher read a portion of the story *Bud, Not Buddy* aloud and modeled, by thinking aloud, how to make predictions, inferences, and questions. The prompt was to make and discuss predictions and questions.

- 1A. So what do we predict?
 2B. What just happened?
 3A. Bud met nice people like in the food line and the guy with the car.
 4B. So what do you think's gonna happen?
 5A. Maybe he'll meet his dad, I think.
 6B. Why you predict that?
 7A. Cuz he needs a family. And because he's nice and he merece (deserves) a good family.
 8B. What do you mean merece...like deserve?
 9A. Yeah. All kids deserve family to help them. It's what I think. They shouldn't be in huerphanages. Do you have a question?



Conversation 6, cont. - 5TH ELA

- 10A. Here. Why was there so much racism?
- 11B. What evidence supports that?
- 12A. One example is Mr. Callway always has a white person in the band.
- 13B. Why?
- 14A. Something about having land. Like black people couldn't have land, I think. He needed a white person to sign papers.
- 15B. So (looking up at board), why did the author write this?
- 16A. Maybe to tell how hard life was back then, like with racism?
- 17B. Yeah, but maybe also to, like, tell how people are good. Bud met nice people. And he only did one mean thing, like putting that kid's hand in warm water//
- 18A. //to make him pee in the bed. That was funny, but he deserved it. Lo mereció.

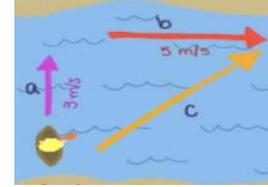
Conversation 7 - 6th Gr. Science

- 1A: What is the biggest advantage of the moon?
- 2B: I don't know.
- 3A: What's in your notes?
- 4B: A tilt of earth, like here. But I can't say it.
- 5A: I got that, too. So no moon and earth tilts more, changes more. I didn't understand. They talked about a hammer and balance.
- 6B: Like mars. No moon.
- 7A: Oh yeah. And mars is desert. And if all its ice melts, what?
- 8B: Inundaciones (floods).
- 9A: I know. And maybe crazy weather, too. So, what's another benefit?
- 10B: La marea (tides)
- 11A: What do you mean?
- 12B: Gravity pulls on water.
- 13A: Yeah, I wonder how bad to have no tides.



Conversation 8 – 8th Gr. Math

- A: What do we need to find?
 B: How far the boat goes down the river.
 A: So, how?
 B: Maybe figure out the time to cross it, like straight, like this (a).
 A: I think we should just add the speeds together.
 B: OK, that's 5 plus 3 equals 8. Then what?
 A: We need to use the other number, 30. So divide?
 B: Why not. OK, so 30 divided by 8 is 3.75.
 A: 3.75 what?
 B: Meters, I think, but that doesn't look right.
 A: No, so what do we do?
 B: I don't know.



Conversation 9 – 8th Gr. History

- B: The article's about the Boston Massacre. But I don't think it was a massacre.
 A: What do you mean? Look at the picture.
 B: I don't think it happened like that, and like only five people were killed. That's not a massacre. A massacre means lots of people die.
 A: Maybe they wanted to make it sound really bad. Like in the painting.
 B: But why?
 A: Maybe get people mad to fight against England. Cuz they didn't all want to fight. Like rich people, I think.
 B: Yeah, maybe they lose their money or die.
 A: But it was a lie to call it a massacre, I think.
 B: I don't know. Maybe, but it worked, right? It got the war going, and now we're free.
 A: But it was lying. I don't think people should lie, even if it helped us get free from England.



III. Assessment AS Learning

Ask for an (another) example to support the idea

Paraphrase what your partner said

Ask your partner to clarify (Why...How...)

Build up the first idea first

Show that you are listening with your eyes, nods, posture

Pose an alternative idea and start to build it up

Stay focused on the conversation prompt/purpose

Encourage your partner to talk more

Summarize the conversation up until now

Learning with and from the Cards – 5th Gr. ELA

A: So, what do you think the poem is about?

B: I think maybe something like, You gotta be yourself. What do you think?

A: I think it's about being out in nature, that it's good to see plants...

Oh, OK, So, why do you think it's about 'be yourself'?

B: Cuz it says he doesn't want to be growing in clusters in the valley, and stand alone, and like not stuck in a pot of dirt.

A: I like that. And the title is "Identity"

B: Yeah...

How does that help us?

A: Identity means how you're different...

Identity (excerpt, by Julio Noboa Polanco)

Let them be as flowers,
always watered, fed, guarded, admired,
but harnessed to a pot of dirt.

I'd rather be a tall, ugly weed,
an eagle
high, jagged rocks.

I'd rather be unseen, and if
then shunned by everyone,
than to be a pleasant-smelling flower,
growing in clusters in the fertile valley,
where they're praised, handled, and
plucked by greedy, human hands.

could stand alone, strong and free,
rather be a tall, ugly weed.

Build up first idea first

How does the title support the idea?

Learning with and from the Cards– 7th Gr. Science

1 Karla: So, why do squids have ink?

2 Maya: For writing.

3 Karla: What do you mean?

4 Maya: Ink is for writing.

5 Karla: Squids can't write...

OK, so what do you mean that they write?

6 Maya: Not with pens like us, but like maybe on a rock. Like to mark their place.

7 Karla: I don't understand that, but I think they got ink to.., they escape. Like the picture.

8 Maya: OK...

How do they escape with ink?

9 Karla: They let it out and it makes a cloud so they, you know, can swim away.

10 Maya: And maybe it poisons the fish?

11 Karla: I don't know; I think jellyfish have poison.

12 Maya: I hate jellyfish: the poison ones.

13 Karla: People die from their stings, I think.



Ask partner to clarify

Ask to clarify "escape"

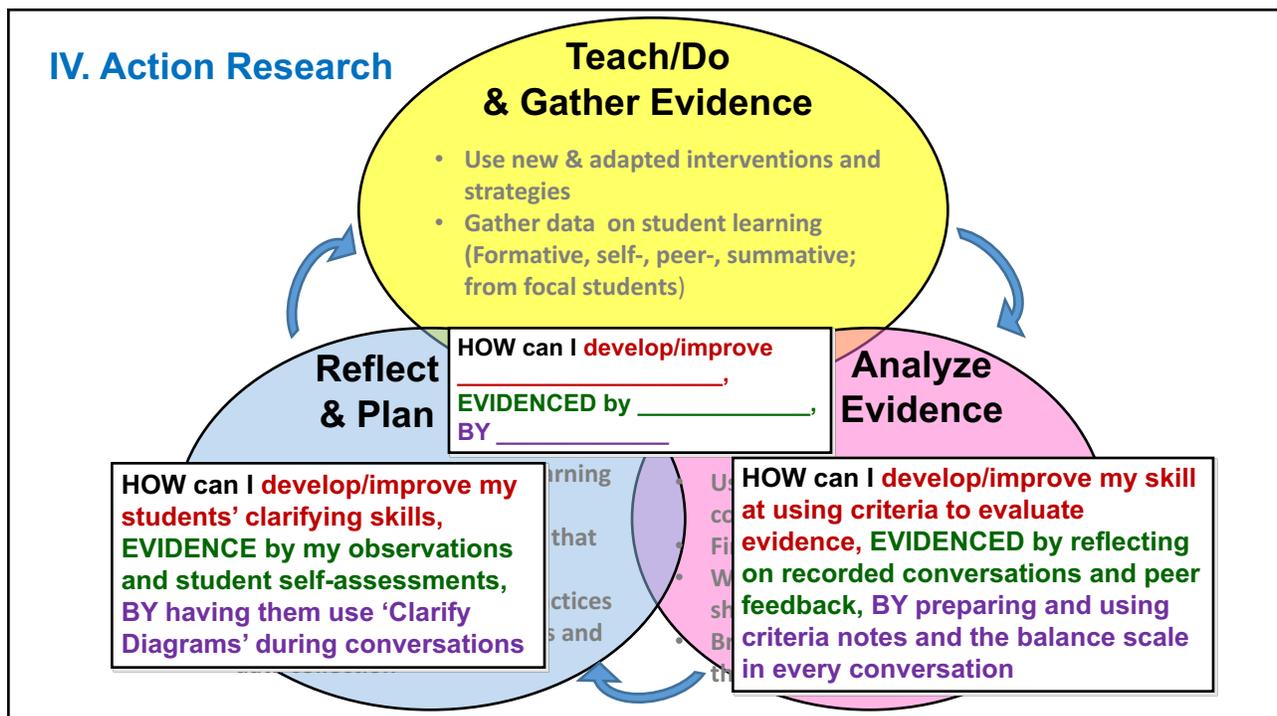
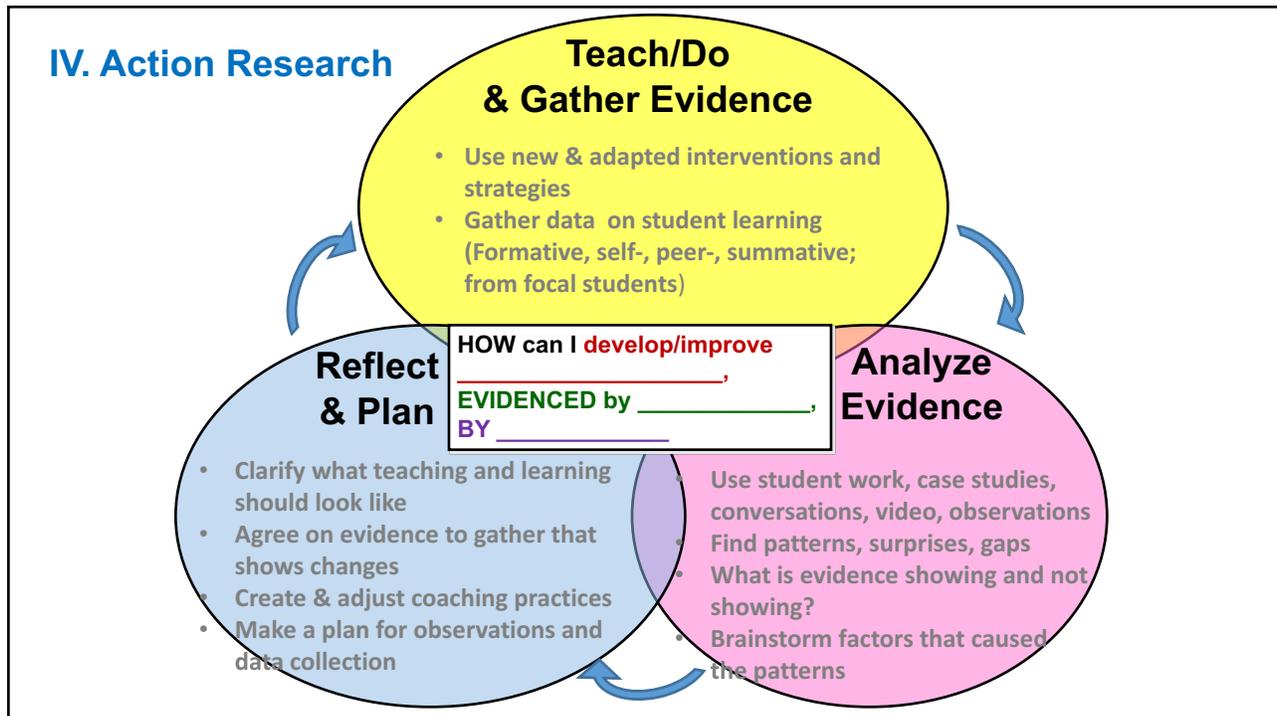
Stay focused on topic

STUDENT Conversation Reflection Tool

1. Is conversing with peers is a productive use of class time? Why or why not?
2. What is the purpose of a classroom conversation with a peer? Feel free to use examples
3. _____ I learn and remember more when I have conversations. (1 to 5)
4. _____ I push myself and peers to be as clear as possible in conversations. (1 to 5)
5. _____ The teacher provides modeling, scaffolding, and feedback for helping me get better at conversation. (1 to 5)
6. Self-rate your skills based on your conversations this week (1 to 5):

_____ Clarifying
 _____ Supporting
 _____ Evaluating
 _____ Listening

_____ Speaking
 _____ Listening
 _____ Thinking
 _____ Nonverbals



NEXT STEPS



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