



Academic Conversations as a Gateway to Academic Literacy

Jeff Zwiers

November 7, 2017

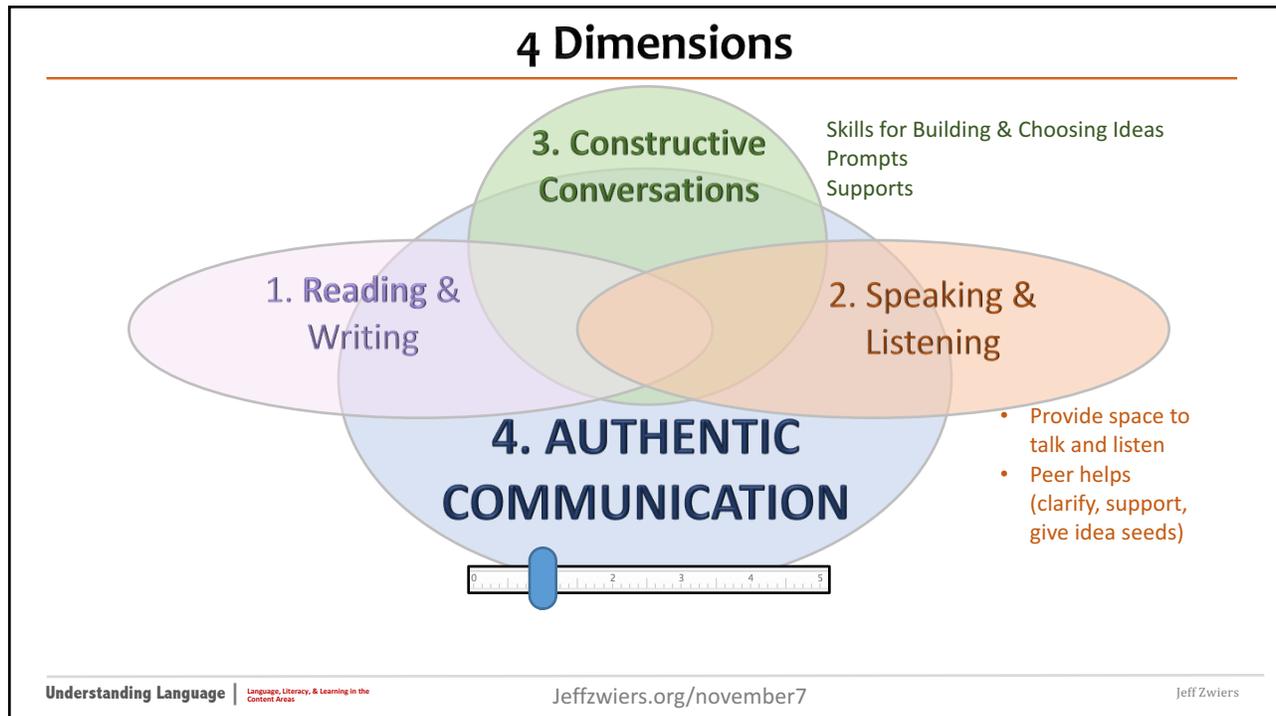
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AGENDA

- I. Overview of our work together
- II. Conversation Skills
- III. Conversation Support Activities
- IV. Conversation-focused Inquiry
- V. Next Steps & Next Time





*If you don't truly **use** language, you won't truly learn it.*

“Ladies and gentlemen, from the cockpit, this is your airplane mechanic. I was asked to fly the plane today. I have never flown a plane before, nor in this type of weather, but I do know all the names of all the engine parts and how they fit together... So sit back, relax, & enjoy your flight.”



SHIFT from...

LESS

Individual accumulating
of right answers,
“paying” for points, &
playing school



to



MORE

**Collaborating,
understanding,
building, using, &
communicating
whole ideas**



How does language use differ between these two?

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**Speaking & Conversations:
Overlap & Differences**



Speaking

is one-way, one-time,
clear & strong
communication of
ideas & thinking.

*Think-pair-shares,
Answering teacher
questions, Jigsaws,
Gallery walks,
Oral presentations*

Conversations

are back-and-forth
interactions in which
participants *build*
on one another’s ideas
to *build up* ideas that
weren’t in their minds
before talking.

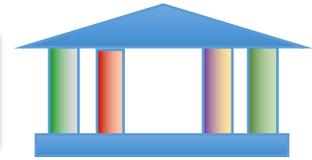


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Build up Authentic Communication Features (for Accelerating Language Development)

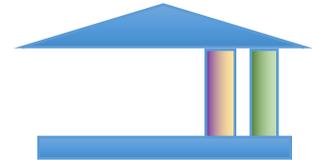
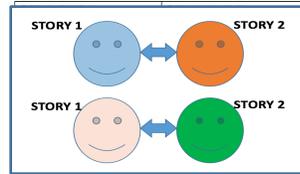
___ **Useful & engaging purpose.** Students use language to do/build/change something beyond just answering questions for praise or points. Clarity matters. Agency.

Decide how Columbus
Co-design an experiment
that helps you measure
gravity



+

___ **Information gap(s).** Students get or give information that they want, need, or don't have. (natural or created) (students need one another)



___ **Attention to language in service of communication?** There is extra work on language used.

- Language modeling & scaffolding (e.g., sentence frames)
- Practice
- Formative feedback



CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS

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*)



Let's Converse

“We need to get back to basics. I learned that way, and look at me? I’m an administrator in a respected school district. Student-centered learning? If students can teach themselves, then why go to school? We need to get back to teachers teaching and students learning. This is how we will raise achievement. Just look at our test scores. They didn’t go up at all this year. We even tried getting kids to talk to one another in conversations. When I did several walk-throughs, some pairs weren’t even talking about the prompt. And it was loud. They should be using that time reading and writing and preparing for the tests so that we can show achievement and narrow the gaps between groups of kids. We have lots of language learners and they need repetition and practice and lots of academic vocabulary.”

Are conversations in class worth the time and effort for all students?

WHY: The Power of Collaborative Conversations

**CONTENT: Clarify,
Use, & Reinforce**

**LANGUAGE:
Input + Output**

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

**ACADEMIC THINKING:
Critical & Creative**

**Social Skills, Relationships
Empathy, Equity,
Agency, Identity, Belonging**

Much of this happens naturally—which is nice—but how do we maximize these?

Build Conversation-Rich Classroom Culture: Reduce these OBSTACLES

- Our desire for “control”
(e.g., “I don’t know what they’re saying back there.”) (Low agency)
- Students don’t push selves or others for clarity
(i.e., because clarity isn’t needed in the task)
- Teaching to assessments that don’t value or inspire communication
- Focusing on points and grades → (“Black Hole Pull” to do the bare minimum)
- Lack of academic conversation assessments, models, supports, and practice time
(Scrimmage)
- Over-structured “discourse” activities and over-use of
sentence frames

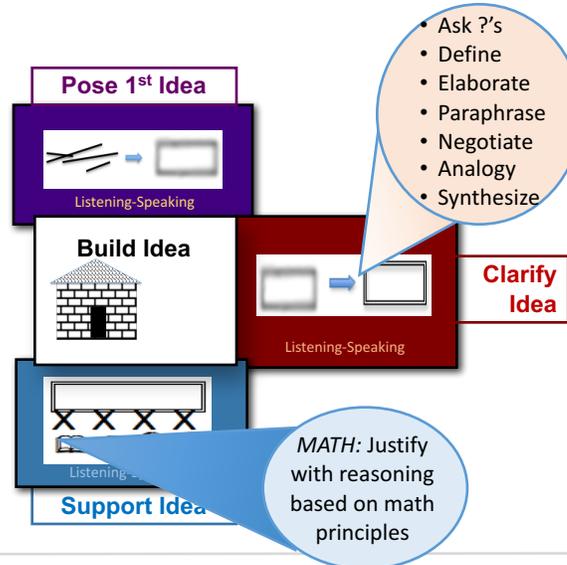


**How can we
reduce these?**

Constructive Conversation Skills (Build one Idea)

Students (w/o teacher) collaboratively build an idea (e.g., claim, answer, solution, interpretation)—*not just answer questions*—using the skills on the right:

(Notice that these are not “natural” in many students and eventually need to be “automatic”):



Conversation (Build 1 Idea)

Alicia: Rosa Parks. Marcos said all she did was sit down, but I think she was a hero.

Paty: I agree. She has a book about her.

Alicia: Why do you think a whole book?

Paty: She was so brave to go to jail, and it was like just cuz she sat down on a bus.

Alicia: Jail is scary, I think. They put you in the bars with ...ladrones and//

Paty: //Yeah, and I think she knew it would happen. That's a hero cuz she knew they would put her in jail.

Alicia: And she started the...what's that word?

Paty: Boycott. They stopped using the buses.

Alicia: Boycott, so it, it changed those racism rules. All cuz of Rosa! ... Where's Marcos?



Constructive Conversations in 9th ELA

Context

- Sheltered 9th grade English class
- Intermediate and early advanced speakers.
- Have read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men*
- Focal conversation skill: supporting your ideas with examples from a text.
- Some prompts are on the board



This Clip

- Prompt: "What do you think an important theme in this book is?"
- How do they clarify and support ideas? ("What does courage mean?" "Can you elaborate on that?" "Can you give an example from another book?" "How does this apply to our life?")

Constructive Conversations in 8th History

Context

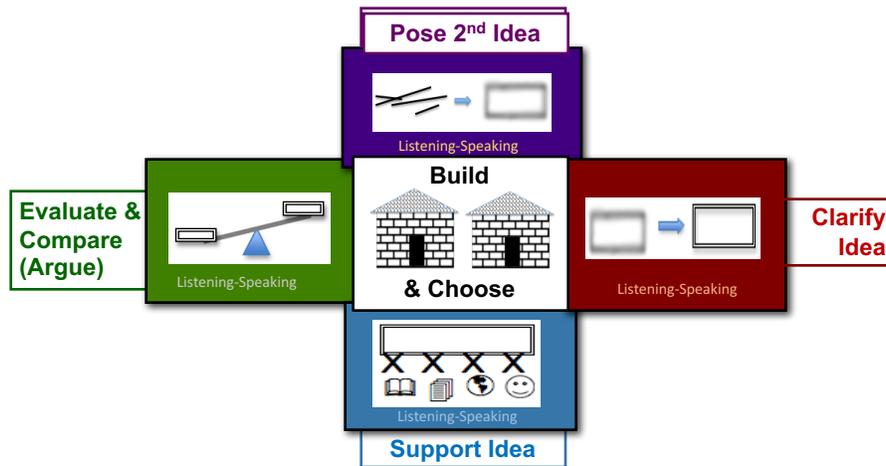
- 8th grade History
- Civil War



This Clip

- Prompt: "How did the Civil War change people's ideas?"
- How do they clarify and support ideas?
- What might they work on?

Constructive Conversation Skills: Collaborative Argument



Hand motions

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Improving Conversations

Laura: I think the main character learned to be humble.

Eli: I respectfully disagree with you.

Laura: Why?

Eli: Because at the end he still was arrogant.



Lisa: I think the dog was his best friend in the story.

Edgar: I would like to add to your idea. My dog ran away last year and we found him in the park.

Lisa: Which park?

Edgar: The one by the train station.

Lisa: I took a train to San Jose last week.



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Conversation Sample (10th ELA)

PROMPT: 'Why does representation in media matter? What are some of the stereotypes that get played out, and how might that affect self-image?'

A: The media makes people think of themselves as their appearances; and the same ideas get repeated.

B: For example on this show the character, she was the boss and she was a woman; so she had to work extra hard. She was a representative and tried to make everybody happy, but then someone said 'I don't want to work for her; she's a woman and he went to go work for a man; they were just stereotyping her as not a leader.

A: That's on a lot of TV and in movies; if they are the boss they are mostly men. There are like 3-5 men for every woman. And if mostly writers and directors are men they will make shows for people like themselves; and they leave out the ladies.

B: Didn't history teach us that we could do anything? We got Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth!

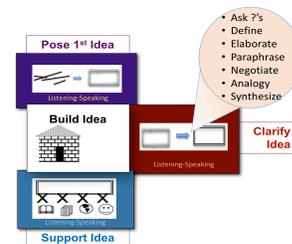
A: I know; I was thinking; why is it still like this?

B: We should make a company that has women that write movies and we can show that ours are just as good. We just need money.

A: A lot of money.

Your Turn (Triads)

"[...] If you don't want a house built, hide the nails and wood. If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war. If the government is inefficient, topheavy, and tax-mad, better it be all those than that people worry over it. Peace, Montag. Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn Iowa grew last year. Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely 'brilliant' with information. Then they'll think they're thinking, they'll get a *sense* of motion without moving. And they'll be happy, because facts of that sort don't change. Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy. (Bradbury, 1953)



Work with a partner to co-construct what you think is the most important theme from this text and how it might connect to today. Quickly decide on one theme and build it up.

Building
Speaking, Listening, & Conversation Skills
with:
TRANSITION IMPROV
Activities



Transition Improv Activity: **Pro-Con**

Topics:

Social media's influence
on language development

*(You will make
recommendations to
teachers and students about
the uses of social media)*

Transitions: **However,**
On the other hand,
Then again,

~~but~~

Frames:

One advantage is ... For example, ...
Another positive of ... is... because...
A negative aspect of ___ is ...
In spite of the positives of _____,

A & B, Lean?

Transition Improv: **For-Against**

Topics: Genetic engineering, electoral college, nuclear energy, social media, human-caused climate change, wolf reintroduction, de-extinction, zoos, year-round schools, corn as fuel, extraterrestrial life, desalination, going to college (2 texts)

Transitions: **However,**
On the other hand,
Then again,

~~but~~

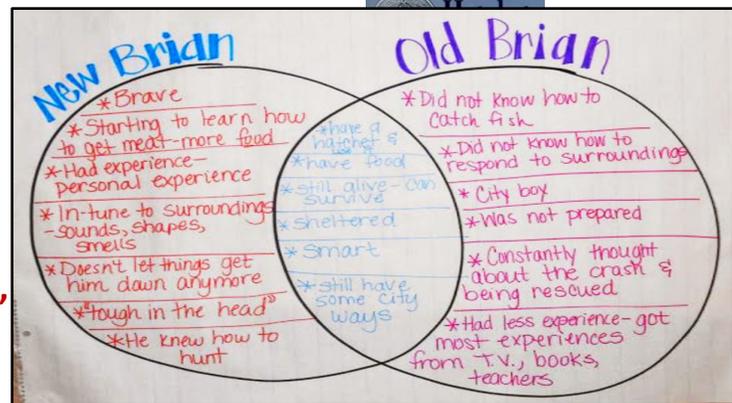
Frames: One reason for ... is ... For example, ...
Evidence that supports ... is... because...
A reason against ... is ... For example, ...
Evidence that does not support ... is ... because ...

A & B,
Lean?

Transition Improv: **Similar-Different**

Topic: old Brian & new Brian

Transitions: **However,**
On the other hand,
Then again,



Frames: Unlike the old Brian, new Brian _____, which came from
Both new and old Brian _____, which ...
New Brian differs from old Brian in that _____
An important trait that didn't change in Brian was ...

Transition Improv: Two Views w/ Evidence

Views: Patriots
Loyalists



Transitions: **However,**
On the other hand,
Then again,

~~but~~

Frames: The ___ thought that ...
Many ___ believed that...
A different perspective held by ___ was that...
In the eyes of ___...

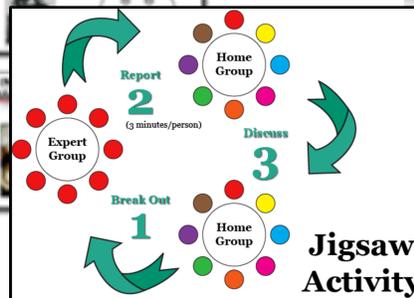
APPLICATION TIME



Think about how you might support conversation skills using **Transition Improv activities** in your upcoming units or lessons.



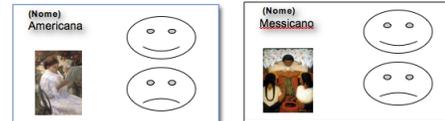
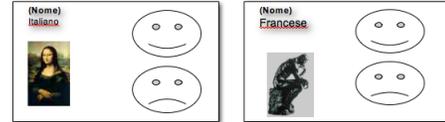
Info Gap Activities for Listening and Speaking



What are situations in each discipline in which two people have to share information?

Information Gap Cards: Who I am

1. Model for students the goal of sharing biographical info (name, nationally, age when you died, likes & dislikes, etc.)
2. Act out needed vocab (like & dislike verbs) on the wall
3. Give a card to each student and let them practice what they will say to themselves
4. Have them find all three other artists and share their information



Information Gap Cards: Who I am

Mi chiamo...

Io sono...

Mi piace... Non mi piace...

Scrivere

Scolpire

Dipingere

Inventare

89 = ottanta nove 67 = sesanta sette 82 = ottanta due

71 = settant'uno

Avevo ___ anni quando morí



4.3 Information Gap Argument Cards

A The main theme of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was “People are essentially good at heart”:

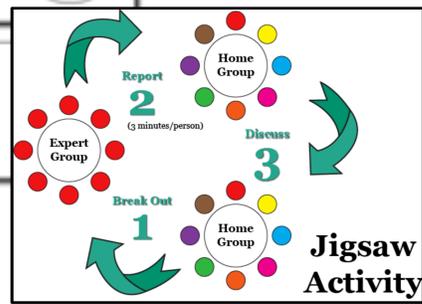
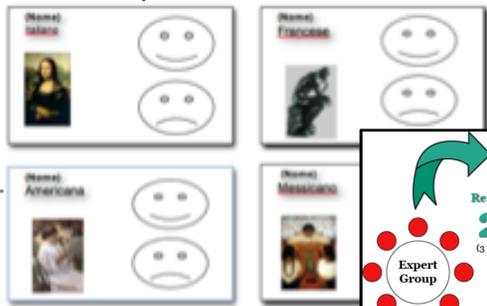
- Ασδφκασ σδφδφ α σσ δδσαδφ ασδδ δ
- Ασδφ αδ δ δδδεφρητφ δφδδκδ[
- Ειρυ φφφφδ πνβχκδ σωοσκδδκα δδ

B The main theme of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was “People are essentially evil at heart”:

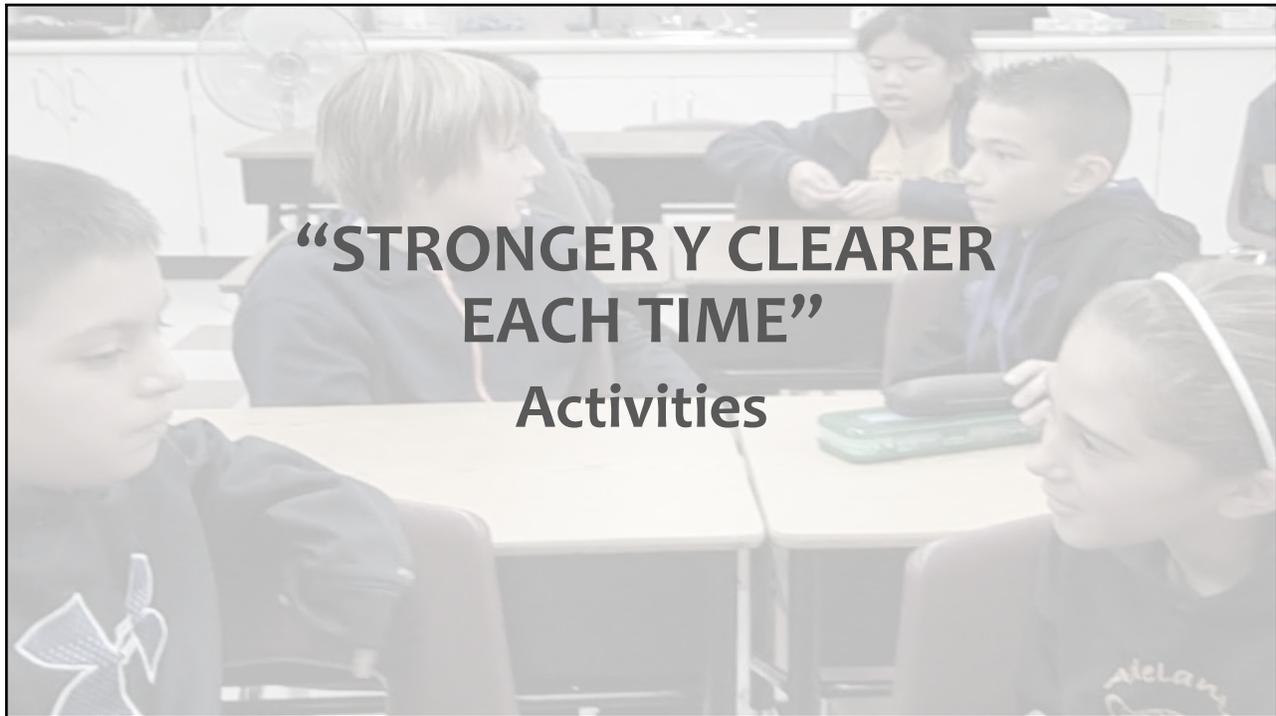
- κδφδφ α γφ δδσαδφ ασδδ δ
- ψσδφ ασ δδδεφρητφ δφδδκδ[
- θγφκφ σλ σδ σ σδφ σωοσκδδκα δδ

1. Teacher previews key vocabulary on cards & goes over sentence starters.
2. Students read and try to remember the points on the card.
3. A and B pairs build up one side, and then the other, and then come to a decision. They can look at the cards, if needed. (You can decide whether you want them to argue for the side on their card, or leave it up to them to decide at the end of the conversation.)

APPLICATION TIME



How can you use information gap activities or “gapify” some activities you already use?



Designing “Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Activities



1. Prompt for an **original response**
2. Successive partners: **borrow and use the language, ideas, and evidence** each time-->
 - **Stronger** (often longer) with better supporting evidence and examples, and
 - **Clearer** with more precise terms and linked, organized, complete sentences.
3. Scaffolds **are reduced during** the activity.

“Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Grid

I think bad things happen when cultures meet, like wars.

Switch partners!
Don't forget to use examples; Stronger + clearer!

I think it's both good and bad. Like you learn from each other, but also you can fight.

(PRE)
Bad things happen when they meet.
Wars start.

Silvia

1st Partner

What happens when cultures meet and why?

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“Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Grid

I think bad things happen when cultures meet, like wars.

Switch partners!
Don't forget to use examples; Stronger + clearer!

I think it's both good and bad. Like you learn from each other, but also you can fight.

Cultures meet and bad things happen like war. But good things, too, like you can learn other language.

Silvia

2nd Partner

1.	Mario	both, learn
2.	Juan	religion, Aztecs,
3.	Spain	
Me		

When cultures meet each other, it helps us to learn how others live, like their religion. But wars can happen, like the Aztecs and Spain.

What happens when cultures meet and why?

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“Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Grid

I think bad things happen when cultures meet, like wars.

Cultures meet and bad things happen like war. But good things, too, like you can learn other language.

When cultures meet, is bad and good. Bad cuz they fight wars, like they're different. Spain thought they were better than the Aztecs. And good cuz you can learn languages, like Spanish, and new religion.

I think
Like y
othe

(PRE)
Bad things happen when they meet.
Wars start.

Wh
oth
oth
Bu
Az

(POST)
When cultures meet, is both bad and good. Bad cuz they fight, like the Aztecs and Spain. Spain thought they were better so they took over. Good cuz of new food and languages and religion.

The
othe
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The

Silvia

happens when cultures meet and why?

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Looking at Student Work (Before & After Grid Partners)

PRE

INTERVIEW TIME!
(Listen in, Share out, Create together)

QUESTION: Why should I care about biodiversity?

MY ANSWER: Because the food chain

POST

I should care about biodiversity because without the variety of living things there wouldn't be anything to provide for us. For example(s) the rosy periwinkle provides a medicine that treats certain cancers including leukemia.

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Stronger & Clearer Activity

Context

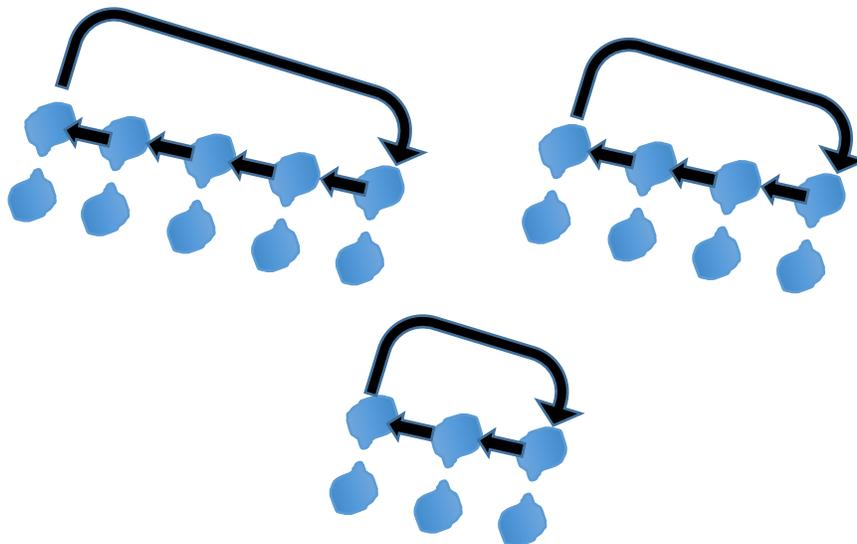
- 4th grade
Science class
- Early Advanced speakers.
- Have read and discussed energy conversion
- Focus on stronger and clearer messages using examples.



This Clip

- Prompt is: What is energy conversion?
- Daniel talks to three different partners
- Look for if and how his response becomes stronger (idea-wise) and clearer (language-wise)
- *Reflect on ways to improve his response and/or the activity.*

Interaction Mini-Lines



“Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Grid

Name	Why is it important to read poetry?	<i>You are an author trying to convince a textbook company to include poetry.</i>
Me	(just two or three key words, if any)	
1.		
2.		
3.		
Me		

“Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Grid

Name	How can developing students’ oral language (speaking, listening, conversing) influence reading and writing?	<i>You will present to colleagues on this topic.</i>
Me	(just two or three key words, if any)	
1.		
2.		
3.		
Me		

One way in which oral language influences reading is...because...
 A student with a strong command of oral language can read...
 Even though.....
~~I disagree with you...~~

Listeners can & should:
 - Prompt for clarification & support
 - Help with “What about...?”

Stronger & Clearer Each Time: Quotation Café

1. Choose key quotations from the text and put them on strips.
2. Tell students the title and have them read their own quotation.
(They can memorize it, too)
3. Students meet with students who have different quotations, read quotes to each other, and both predict what the text will be about. (They can also ask questions.)
4. They can use frames such as:

“I predict that the text will be about _____ because _____”

“Given the clues I have heard so far, such as _____, I think the text will _____”



Towards Knowledge Societies

Stronger & Clearer Each Time: Opinion Continuum

I think video games are bad cuz they show violence. I am way on the Ban side.

Switch partners!
Shift your position, if needed. Stronger & Clearer!

I'm on the not ban side. In my opinion, video games are kinda good. I know some games you shoot people, but some teach you.



Silvia



1st
Partner

Me

Video Games Banned or Not?

BAN

NOT BAN

Mona

Stronger & Clearer Each Time: Opinion Continuum

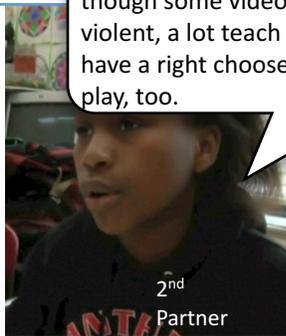
I think video games are bad cuz they show violence. I am way on the Ban side.

I'm on the ban side, but not all the way. In my opinion, games should be banned because war video games show kids how shoot others. But some teach you about life.

Switch partners!
Shift your position, if needed. Stronger & Clearer!

I'm on the not ban side. In my opinion, video games are kinda good. I know some games you shoot people, but some teach yo

I am on the far right side. Even though some video games are violent, a lot teach you. We have a right choose what we play, too.

Me

Video Games Banned or Not?



BAN | | | | | NOT BAN

Morgan Lee

NOT BAN

Stronger & Clearer Each Time: Opinion Continuum

I think video games are bad cuz they show violence.

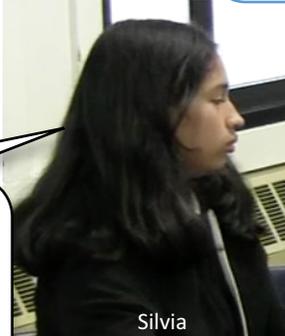
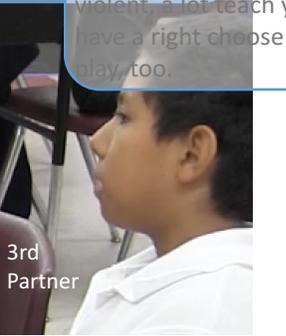
I'm on the ban side, but not all the way. In my opinion, games should be banned because war video games show kids how shoot others. But some teach you about life.

I am just left of middle. Even though some video games are good, violent ones should be banned. Kids' minds fill up with violence. Some games can teach to solve problems and learn, which made me move over toward NOT BAN.

Switch partners!
Shift your position, if needed. Stronger & Clearer!

In my opinion, video games are bad. Like war games show kids how to shoot other people.

I am on the far right side. Even though some video games are violent, a lot teach you. We have a right choose what we play, too.

Me

Games Banned or Not?



BAN | | | | | NOT BAN

Morgan Lee

NOT BAN

APPLICATION TIME



Think about how you might plan using Stronger & Clearer Each Time activities—and/or adaptations to similar activities such as Gallery Walks and Jigsaws in your upcoming units or lessons.

Write a Conversation Prompt

- ❑ **There is an engaging purpose** for conversing that (a) **connects to lesson objectives**, and (b) **requires thinking & doing something with ideas**
(e.g., create, clarify, argue (=>consensus), decide, rank, solve, evaluate, combine, compare, choose, fortify, build, & transform) (+ *Agency*)
- ❑ **There is a need to talk**
(info gaps; bring unique ideas)
- ❑ **There are clear & helpful directions** for how to converse (language use, thinking, content concepts...)

ELA Literature: Collaboratively decide whether or not Atticus should take a stand to defend Tom Robinson. Co-build both sides up with evidence from the text and explain how the evidence supports each side. Then decide which side weighs more and why. Use support language such as *support, evidence, because...* Also remember to use effective nonverbal communication.

Write a Conversation Prompt

ELA Literature: Work with a partner to co-construct an idea for the strongest and most important theme that the author intended for readers to learn. Build up the idea by clarifying it and supporting it with examples and evidence from the text. Explain how the evidence supports the idea. Use effective body language and facial expressions, and make sure to value one another's ideas.

ELA Literature: Collaboratively decide

ELA Expository: Decide whether or not to raise the max number of hours per day that teenagers should use screens. Engage in a collaborative argument conversation in which you and your partner build up both sides of the issue and. Use evidence and discuss the credibility of sources. Discuss and negotiate types of screen time, if necessary, for your final decision. Use evaluation language such as *outweigh*, *weak/strong because*, *credible*, etc.

Improve Conversation Prompts

History: You will co-author a letter to a history journal. Converse with your partner to decide if Lincoln was more interested in abolishing slavery or more interested in preserving the Union. Use evidence to support the claims on each side and evaluate the value of the evidence, along with any bias that might exist in the sources. Use historian language such as "This is strong evidence because..."

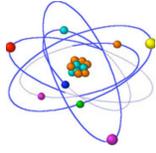
ELA Literature: Collaboratively decide

ELA Expository: Decide whether or not to raise the max number of hours per day that teenagers should use screens. Engage in a collaborative argument conversation in which you and your partner build up both sides of the issue and. Use evidence and discuss the credibility of sources. Discuss and negotiate types of screen time, if necessary, for your final decision. Use evaluation language such as *outweigh*, *weak/strong because*, *credible*, etc.

Know the Types of Conversations in Different Disciplines



- Deciding between two or more sides of a controversial issue
- Collaborating to agree on interpretations in literature
- Collaborating to agree on the best ways to communicate ideas to others



- Collaborating to interpret data and generate scientific explanations
- Solving problems & deciding between two sides of controversial science issues
- Role-based improv conversations



- Deciding between two sides of an issue or account
- Collaborating to solve social problems and challenges
- Collaborating to explain events, systems, and people



- Collaborating to solve a problem
- Collaborating to create new math problems
- Modeling math concepts and experimenting with numbers, symbols, & shapes

Craft a prompt

Formative Assessment Tools: (e.g., Conversation Observation & Analysis Tool (COAT))

PROMPT:

- Useful & Engaging Purpose
 Need to talk + Unique ideas
 Clear and Helpful Directions

QUANTITY

- # of Turns
 Length of turns
 Equity

QUALITY

Use conversation skills:

- Pose
 Clarify
 Support
 Evaluate
 to authentically build and argue useful ideas

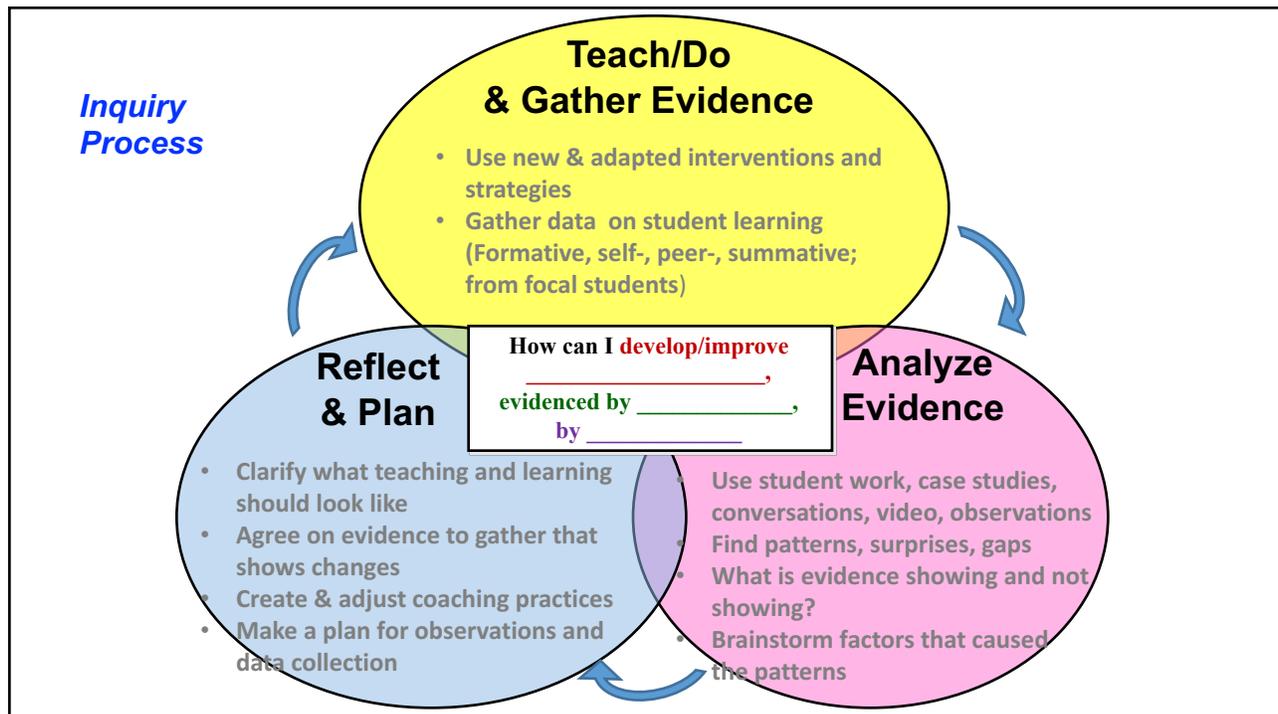
OTHER KEY SKILLS

- Listening
 Speaking
 Thinking
 Content
 Nonverbal
 Valuing Ideas

Final Task

1. Write a good prompt.
2. Write a model conversation for it (A: B:)
3. Analyze it for highest priority skills to teach
4. Craft a lesson that uses the prompt, model conversation, and other activities to teach the high-priority skill.

PROMPT: <input type="checkbox"/> Useful & Engaging Purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Need to talk + Unique ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Clear & Helpful Directions
QUANTITY <input type="checkbox"/> # of Turns <input type="checkbox"/> Length of turns <input type="checkbox"/> Equity
QUALITY Use conversation skills: <input type="checkbox"/> Pose <input type="checkbox"/> Clarify <input type="checkbox"/> Support <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate to authentically build and argue useful ideas
OTHER KEY SKILLS <input type="checkbox"/> Listening <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Content <input type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal <input type="checkbox"/> Valuing Ideas



NEXT STEPS



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