

APPENDIX B

Frequently Asked Questions

1. HOW DO I HAVE TIME TO IMPLEMENT ACADEMIC CONVERSATIONS?

Academic conversations can be incorporated into every subject area. For example, after independent reading, students can volunteer to give book talks about their books. After each student talks, another student can offer to paraphrase or retell what she or he said. Another student can ask an elaboration question (e.g., Which character do you like the best and why?). During social studies, students can ask each other in pairs which U.S. citizen right is most important and retell what their partners said. If there is time, teachers can have students practice conversations in class during snack time.

2. HOW CAN WE ACCELERATE THE TRANSFER OF CONVERSATION SKILLS INTO LITERACY?

Paraphrasing and/or retelling are skills students need to use on many types of reading assessments. One suggestion is to teach students to “talk in paragraphs”: give a main idea and two or three supporting details every time you participate. Another suggestion is to have students engage in a written conversation in which they pass a paper back and forth.

3. HOW CAN I DESIGN A STUDENT LEARNING GOAL AND COLLECT DATA ON SKILL DEVELOPMENT?

Start by looking at these sample goals, which can be revised for your instructional setting.

- During this academic year, I will use language function frames to plan effective instruction focused on constructive conversations. The use of language functions will be observed during English language instruction and in general educational settings. Additionally, I will survey students for self-reported use of these functions (e.g., comparing, evaluating, supporting with evidence).
- During this academic year, I will record four paired student academic conversations. Together with my colleagues, we will analyze the conversations

with the Conversation Observation and Analysis Tool (COAT). I will use peer feedback to reflect on and improve instruction for my students. The analysis will focus on how I promote student engagement and student-to-student interaction.

4. MY STUDENTS ARE NOT HAVING “DEEP” CONVERSATIONS. THEY ARE STUCK AT A SUPERFICIAL LEVEL. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Share your challenges with your colleagues during collaboration time or team planning time. Your colleagues may be able to guide you to craft more engaging prompts or think of strategies that could motivate your students to reach higher levels of thinking. Use rubrics or a version of the COAT to assess student work and inform instruction. Model with a student volunteer the in-depth type of conversation that you are expecting. Provide a poster that includes academic phrases to deepen conversations. Ask for two volunteers to video record, and then as a whole class watch the conversation and provide compliments and feedback. (Use this step only if the two volunteers are willing.)

5. HOW CAN I IMPLEMENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MY SCHOOL AROUND ACADEMIC CONVERSATIONS?

A whole school initiative focused on academic conversations can be very effective. Find ways for staff in different roles to participate. Here is an example from the Brophy Elementary School in Framingham, Massachusetts. First, we provided books on academic conversations for the school data team. We introduced the purpose of academic conversations at a faculty meeting. Next, we wrote sample lesson plans and created anchor charts. These were presented to the school data team, who then shared back at grade-level meetings. A feature skill was introduced on a monthly basis. In the first year, we developed a two-credit course that was open to teachers and other staff. Classroom teachers, specialists (including music, art, and PE), and the school social worker all participated. Several of the grade-level teams began to implement use of the Protocol for Analyzing Academic Conversations (see Chapter 5) during their weekly grade-level meetings. The ability to choose an inquiry question and look at student work (conversations and then also written products) was a powerful change agent. Finally, the ELL coach engaged in coaching cycles

with teachers across the school. This embedded coaching included a planning meeting, a co-teaching experience, and a debriefing. Teachers could request the coaching and include it in their professional practice goal.



Visit the companion website at resources.corwin.com/ZwiersK3Guide for videos and downloadable resources.

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