Facilitating Rich Conversations to Promote Language and Higher Order Thinking
Lisa Van Thiel and Mary Lu Love

Goals
In this module participants will:
• Identify how conversations support children in constructing knowledge;
• Understand and apply practices for initiating and extending conversations throughout the day;
• And document children's speech and reflections to facilitate conversations.

EEC Core Competencies
• Competency Area 1: Child Development
• Competency Area 2: Guiding and Interacting with Children and Youth
• Competency Area 5: Learning Environments and Implementing Curriculum
• Competency Area 6: Observation, Assessment, and Documentation
• Competency Area 8: Professionalism and Leadership

What Research Tell Us:
• Teacher talk: teachers initiate, students respond, teacher comments.
• Quality feedback helps children develop rich vocabularies and complex sentence structures.
• High poverty preschool setting often create few conversation opportunities.

Research
• Typical preschool conversation are teacher direction and one word responses to children.
• Too much challenge isn’t engaging and impacts brain functioning.

Conversations to Literacy
• Conversations
  • Short turns
  • Check understanding
  • Shared experiences & knowledge
  • In the same location:
    • Gesture
    • Eye gaze
  • Intonation signals how you feel, marks importance
• Reading
  • No turns!
  • You monitor alone
  • Cannot assume shared knowledge
  • Not shared location
  • No “voice” to signal feeling or importance
  • Rely on words, syntax (grammar), world knowledge

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Conversations

- Through conversations understanding is actively constructed:
  - Talk organizes thinking
  - Language reveals prior knowledge.
  - Conversations provide a context for social learning.

Talking organizes thinking

“Our internal talk is our thinking in action. It is where our thinking takes place. Our thinking is dependent on our inner language, our ability to speak to ourselves – and because of this, our thinking and our continued development as cognitive beings also is dependent upon external conversations. It is through conversations with others that we learn how to use language to begin with.”

Lisa Burman 2009

Halliday’s Functions

- Instrumental
- Personal
- Interactional
- Regulatory
- Representational
- Heuristic
- Imaginative

M.A. Halliday (1999)

Language reveals prior knowledge

- Children learn from physical and social experiences with people and objects.
- Through the social context children learn to become thinkers and problem solvers.

Social Context of Learning

- “Without children talking about their experiences and their thinking, this active connection-making is left to chance. Conversation is social by its nature, and provides young learners with the place, time and challenge to share their experiences, thinking, and questions.”

Lisa Burman 2009

Home School Study of Language and Literacy Development

- Exposure to varied vocabulary,
- Children’s conversations include past, present, and future as well as imaginative events,
- Book reading, rich curriculum, and writing support learning.
Elements of Effective Conversations

- Multiple turn-taking by all parties;
- Mutual interest and investment in the topic and conversation;
- Listening;
- Building upon answers from others;
- Striving for understanding (includes questioning and reflection).

Conversations

1. Children’s voices are most often heard
2. Teacher talk is used to discover children’s ideas
3. Children talk with each other
4. Children have time to think
5. Topics connect children’s interest, exploration, and questions.
6. Conversations are documented and interpreted to reveal thinking.
7. Conversation are use to stretch children’s thinking.
   (Lisa Burman 2009 p.37)

Feedback Loops

Questioning:
- Why do you think so
- What else can you tell us

Clarifying
- You think the insect is hiding, his body blends into the background so well he is camouflaged.

Summarizing
- Now that we have look at many insect and spiders, we know that insect have six legs and spiders have 8.

Predicting:
- What do you think insect eat?

Conversational skills

- Send clear message
- Clear up misunderstandings
- Begin and end conversations appropriately
- Keep the conversation going for longer period of time
- Contribute to the conversation by adding information that is on topic or related

Talk to discover children ideas

- Closed
  Teacher: What is a house made of?
  Child: Brick
  Teacher: What color are bricks?
  Child: Red
  Teacher: Yes but they can also be yellow

Children Talk with Each Other

- Explore new idea
- Hear different perspectives
- Make connections
- Opportunities for cooperative learning
- Peer tutoring
Wait Time is Time to Think

- Increase in number of correct responses
- "I don't know" and "no" answers responses decreased
- Volunteers increased
- Academic achievement increased
- When teachers wait patiently in silence for 3 or more seconds at appropriate places, positive changes in their own teacher behaviors also occur:
  - More varied and flexible questioning strategies used
  - Decrease in the quantity of teach talk
  - Increase the quality of questions and responses
  - Increase in complexity of information processing
  - Increase in higher level thinking used by children

Stahl 1994

Connecting through conversations

- Initial conversations with children and families
- Meal and Snack time
- Regular one on one conversation during center time
- Conversation Stations
- Book reading

Documented and interpreted conversations

- Record
- Video
- Transcribe
- Draw
- Document learning

Strategies for extending conversation

- Blog

Questions

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Why
- How

Environmental Influences

- Physical
- Temporal
- Climate
Whole Group Conversations
Benefits children by:
• Stretching schema’s as they listen to peers experiences
• Draw children into the conversation by listening to the ideas of others
• Talk organizes the learner and his role in the environment

Reflective Conversations for the Whole Group
1. How did the day go?
2. What problems did you solve?
3. What did you learn or think about today?
4. What might you be interested in continuing to explore in the classroom tomorrow?
5. Summarize learning

Small Group Conversations
• Greater participation among children
• Easier to facilitate
• More opportunities to delve deeper into children’s ideas
• A safe environment for participating in a group discussion.

Center time
• Follow child lead
• Extend the conversation
• Extend the play
• Move the conversation from the hear and now to past or future.

Language Stimulation Techniques
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waiting</td>
<td>Slowing pace during conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pausing</td>
<td>Encourage children to take turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming</td>
<td>Responds to all utterances by confirming attempts or understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitating and extending</td>
<td>Respond by repeating what the child says and extending or asking a question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More Language Techniques
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extending</td>
<td>Repeats what child says and adds small amount of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeling</td>
<td>Providing words for actions, objects or abstractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open ended questions</td>
<td>Questions that that require multiple word answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripting</td>
<td>Providing a language model, best for routine activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conversations with Children

“Vocabulary, language skills, and knowledge about the world are acquired during interesting conversations with responsive adults. Talking about books, about daily happenings, or even about what happened in day care or at work, not only contributes to children’s vocabularies, but also increases their ability to understand stories and explanations and increases their understanding of how things work — all skills that will be important in early reading.”


Higher Order Thinking

Higher order thinking takes thinking to higher levels than restating facts and requires students to DO something with the facts:

- understand them
- infer from them
- connect them other facts and concepts
- categorize them
- manipulate them
- put them together in new or novel ways and
- apply them to seek new solutions to new problems.

Adapted from Reading Rockets, Thomas & Thorne, 2009

Strategies for Enhancing Higher Order Thinking

- Explicitly teach the BIG IDEA
- Guide students in naming key concepts
- Tell and show
- Move from concrete to abstract and back
- Expand discussions at home
- Connect concepts
- Teach inference

Reflect on your own conversations?

- Are children’s voices heard more than adults?
- Does you engage in a dialogue with children or a one sided monologue?
- Do children talk with each other in the classroom, whole group, or small groups.
- Do you give children time think?
- Is time allotted in during the day to engage in conversation with children around topics connect to their interest, exploration, and questions?
- Do you document conversations?
- Are conversations used to stretch children’s thinking?
Apply and Reflect

- Record one conversation with children in which you intentionally teach children a concept.
- Select an appropriate instructional format.
- Discuss how you will scaffold learning.
- List questions you will ask to engage children in meaningful conversation.

Record a conversation with children

- Play the tape back and ask yourself the following questions:
  - Who is doing the talking?
  - What do you talk about with children?
  - What is the purpose of talk?
  - Are children sharing their experiences with others?
  - Are children expressing their learning or thinking?

Moving Forward

Image by John Donaghy

Image by timlewisnm