

What's Everyone Talking About? Increasing Student Conversations

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Time Frame 120-150 minutes

Essential Question(s)

Summary

Productive student conversations are a vital part of deep, flexible understanding of content. During this session, participants will increase their awareness of productive and scaffolded student conversations in the classroom or within a synchronous online learning platform, such as Summit or Odyssey.

Learning Goals

- Participants will recognize strategies for supporting student conversations in their classrooms.
- Participants will explore why student conversations are important.
- Participants will identify how student conversations are integrated within the Summit Learning platform.
- Participants will develop a plan for increasing the number of student conversations in their classrooms.

Attachments

- Chain Notes—What's Everyone Talking About.docx
- Chain Notes—What's Everyone Talking About.pdf
- I Think We Think—What's Everyone Talking About.docx
- I Think We Think—What's Everyone Talking About.pdf
- Instructional Strategy Note Catcher—What's Everyone Talking About.docx
- Instructional Strategy Note Catcher—What's Everyone Talking About.pdf
- Instructional Strategy Scatter Plot—What's Everyone Talking About.docx
- Instructional Strategy Scatter Plot—What's Everyone Talking About.pdf
- Magnetic Statements—What's Everyone Talking About.docx
- Magnetic Statements—What's Everyone Talking About.pdf
- Presenter Slides—Student Conversations.pptx
- SMART Goals—What's Everyone Talking About.docx
- SMART Goals—What's Everyone Talking About.pdf
- Student Conversations Reading—What's Everyone Talking About.docx
- Student Conversations Reading—What's Everyone Talking About.pdf

Materials

- Presentation Slides (attached)
- Highlighters
- Devices with Internet access
- Pens or pencils
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Magnetic Statements (attached; one copy)
- Instructional Strategy Scatter Plot handouts (attached; one per participant)
- Instructional Strategy Note Catcher handouts (attached; one per participant)
- SMART Goals handouts (attached; one per participant)
- I Think/We Think handouts (attached; one per participant)
- Chain Notes handouts (attached; one per participant)
- Student Conversations Reading (attached; one per participant)

Essential Question

How can productive student conversations enhance learning?

Engage

Presenter's Note: Prepping the Room

Have handouts and materials available on the table for participants. All participants should receive a copy of the Instructional Strategy Note Catcher, Instructional Strategy Scatter Plot, SMART Goals, Student Conversations Reading, Chain Notes, and I Think/We Think handouts. Tables work best when organized into small working groups.

Welcome participants and briefly introduce yourself and the professional development session.

Begin by displaying **slide 4**. To help engage participants, you will set up a mock classroom scenario, but you should lead participants to think that this is an actual event that took place in a classroom. Set the scene by acting serious and playing it up as a genuine experience!

Presenter's Note: Keeping It Light

This setup has a humorous tone, so keep that in mind when you consider your presentation style. It uses a clip from the TV show *South Park*, but don't worry, as there is no explicit language or content in the clip.

Describe the scenario as follows:

"You had a Swivl observation with one of your teachers who wanted some feedback about ways to increase student voice in the classroom. You provided the teacher with a strategy to try and recorded a video clip of him implementing it with his class. He gave permission for you to share this observation. We are going to watch the observation video together, looking for things the teacher did well and areas where he could continue to improve."

Go to **slide 5** and play the video clip. Enjoy the reactions when participants realize they're watching a TV show!

After you and the participants have watched the video clip, display **slide 6**.

Introduce the Roundabout Conversations strategy. Tell participants that they will use this strategy to discuss what the teacher did well and potential areas of improvement.

Have participants find a partner from another part of the room, and then click to reveal the first conversation question on slide 6: "What did the teacher do well?" Let pairs know that they have a total of four minutes for both partners to share their thoughts about the question.

Formative Assessment: What Went Well?

As pairs talk, move around the room and listen to what they are saying to get an impression of what they think the teacher did well. This observation will give you insight into what your participants value and how creatively they're thinking, considering there wasn't much going well in the video clip.

After time is up, ask participants to find another partner. Click to display the second conversation question on slide 6: “What are areas that have room for improvement?” Give pairs another four minutes to discuss this question.

Formative Assessment: What Went Wrong?

Again, move around the room and listen to what participants are saying. How many details were they able to notice? The easy response is that the teacher is not paying attention and is reading a book. But, a more subtle example might be how the desks are in rows with only one student talking, which is a restricted view of student voice.

After time is up, have participants return to their seats.

When participants have settled back in, ask what they would offer as a recommendation for this teacher to grow in his practice. Call on a few people and try to keep it serious and fun at the same time to match the task.

Once participants have had an opportunity to provide their thoughts, display **slide 7** and share the session objectives.

1. Participants will recognize strategies for supporting student conversations in their classrooms.
2. Participants will explore why student conversations are important.
3. Participants will identify how student conversations are integrated within the Summit Learning platform.
4. Participants will develop a plan for increasing the frequency or number of student conversations.

Display **slide 8** and direct participants to the **Instructional Strategy Scatter Plot** handout. Frame the task by sharing that student conversations can look and feel different in many ways. Tell participants that today’s session will focus on two ways that we can tweak what we ask of students: the level of noise and the amount they get up and move around. These concepts are represented on the scatter plot’s two axes: Talking and Moving.

Ask participants to think back on the Roundabout Conversations instructional strategy that they just engaged with and plot on their graphs where they believe it relates to talking and moving. When they have finished, let them know that they'll be revisiting this scatter plot throughout the session.

Formative Assessment: Allow for Personal Differences

It’s okay if participants plot the strategy differently than what you had in mind. The amount of noise or movement is a personal perception. How participants answer could inform you of what their comfort level is and how far individuals would be willing to experiment with other conversation-related instructional strategies.

Explore

Display **slide 9,** which details the Magnetic Statements strategy. Tell participants that they will read the statements and then decide if they are "attracted to" (agree with) or "repelled by" (disagree with) each one. On their **Instructional Strategy Note Catcher** handouts, they should circle how they feel and write why they feel that way.

Instruct participants to have a low-voice conversation with an Elbow Partner about how and why they feel this way. Tell participants to record their thoughts as well as their partner's thoughts. Repeat the procedure with the next two statements.

We have chosen the following three statements for this activity, but you are welcome to add more:

1. A personalized learning platform like Summit gives teachers a deeper understanding of each child, sparks student conversations, and increases motivation (Summit; **slide 10**).
2. When students interact with peers in a way that is on-task and involves higher-order thinking processes, it leads to higher student engagement (Johnson, 2015; **slide 11**).
3. When students are collaborating, discussing topics, etc., the teacher is responsible for interacting and engaging with the groups (**slide 12**).

Presenter's Note: Intention

Each of these statements has a citation, which means they are technically all "correct," but the statements are written in a way that allows space for interpretation.

Display **slide 13**, which reminds participants that there are specific non-content skills that research says support deep, lifelong learning, and literacy is represented in all standards. Be explicit with participants that conversations might not be directly tested, but they are an important part of student learning. Research shows that often speaking and listening are ignored on our standards. They aren't something we "test." However, they are still crucial to student rigor!

The last bullet point on slide 13 is meant to transition participants from their prior experiences to new learning.

Display **slide 14** and direct participants back to their scatter plots. Have them think back on the Magnetic Statements instructional strategy that they just experienced and plot on their graphs where they believe it relates to talking and moving.

Next, direct participants' attention to their Instructional Strategy Note Catcher and display **slide 15**. On this note catcher there is a place for the participants to reflect on how the strategies have been used and how they might use it in their classroom. Provide participants with a few minutes to complete this reflection for the Roundabout Conversations and Magnetic Statements strategies.

Formative Assessment: A Chance for Observation

Just as with Roundabout Conversations, this is a chance for you to move around the room and observe what participants are writing. This observation is a great gauge of participants' engagement in the session and what they're thinking would work for their classrooms.

Display **slide 16**. Ask for volunteers to share out, and record their answers on a whiteboard or a digital whiteboard.

As you move through the next four slides, circle any responses that were already presented by one of the participants. Use this exercise to see how close they were! If an element wasn't shared out, take a moment to give participants time to comprehend what's on the slide.

Slides 17-20 are all structures within teaching that ask for student conversations. For each slide, point out how the standards or expectations are connected to student conversations, both for students and for teachers.

English Language Arts Literacy Standards (**slide 17**)

- Speaking and Listening
- Reading Foundations with Reading and Writing Process
- Critical Reading and Writing
- Vocabulary
- Language
- Research
- Multimodal Literacies
- Independent Reading and Writing*

Independent Reading and Writing

*Although Independent Reading and Writing doesn't necessarily include student conversations directly, it is an ELA standard, and if it weren't included, teachers might question why.

Formative Assessment: Asking Why

Asking participants why they think we included independent reading and writing as a standard supported by student conversations will help you assess participants' interpretation of reading and writing as a task and how that fits into the larger ability to communicate.

The 4 Cs of 21st Century skills (**slide 18**)

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Critical Thinking
- Creativity

21st Century Skills

These standards are intended to propel students to be competitive in today's society and the world at large. They might not be the OAS for their subject area, but they are the skills we want our students to have.

Marzano's TLE (**slide 19**)

- Using questions to help students elaborate on content
- Facilitate a student brainstorm
- Conditions for learning: organizing students to interact with content
- Providing grouping strategies and interaction
- Interacting responsibly
- Handling controversy
- Various group processes and activities to reflect the taxonomy level learning targets

Teacher Effectiveness

Even if a school does not use Marzano as its teacher effectiveness framework, all teacher effectiveness measures include components similar to this.

When you arrive at **slide 20** (Summit's Cognitive Rubric), provide participants with an opportunity to think of one of the lessons their students are currently working on. Ask them to pinpoint where in the lesson student conversations take place and then determine where on the rubric this falls.

Presenter's Note: Summit Learning

If the participants' school does not use the Summit Learning platform, hide this slide. If an alternate platform is used that has a similar rubric, you can input it here.

Explain

Display **slide 21**, which details the Chain Notes instructional strategy for participants. Direct them to the **Student Conversations Reading** handout.

Tell participants that they will read through the research brief and highlight things they think would matter to them in their classroom.

Presenter's Note: Strategy Point-Out

There are quite a few strategies in this presentation. If you think it will not overload participants, you can share with them that the highlighting they are doing is a modification of the Why-Lighting annotation strategy. However, that's not the focus of the activity, so read the room and decide if it's needed or not.

Once participants have finished the reading, let them know that they will work in teams of four (**slides 22-24**) to complete the Chain Notes activity. Display **slide 22** and explain to the group that you are going to guide them through the first round.

Helpful Hint: Learning the Strategy

Suggest to participants that if they want to try this version of Chain Notes in their classrooms for the first time, they should practice the procedure with a non-academic topic first to keep the cognitive demand low while students are learning the procedure.

1. In box 1 on the table, participants write one generic example of a non-substantive conversation.
2. In box 2, building on what was written in box 1, participants write one generic example of a substantive conversation.
3. Participants pass their paper to the person sitting on their right.

Display **slide 23**, Trying Chain Notes Continued:

1. Participants will take a moment to read what was written on the paper handed to them and then add one specific example each of substantive and non-substantive conversations that connect back to the generic statements.
2. Participants pass their papers to the person on their right and repeat with another example of generic and specific examples.

Display **slide 24**, which is a visual representation of what each step will look like. Let participants know that what is on the slide is not the only correct answer but provides one example of generic and specific examples.

Repeat the procedure two more times until participants get their original papers back. Participants should then read all of the statements their team has added and write one statement to summarize all the information.

Display **slide 25** and direct participants back to their scatter plots. Have them consider the Chain Notes instructional strategy and plot on their graphs where they believe it relates to talking and moving.

Display **slide 26** and direct participants back to their note catchers. Provide them with a few minutes to reflect on the Chain Notes strategy.

Extend

Using the I Think/We Think instructional strategy, team members will come to a consensus on where student conversations can occur in their classrooms.

Tell participants to regroup with their primary working team. This will be different depending on the way the school is structured, so be ready to be flexible in how they group together.

Direct participants to their **SMART Goals** and **I Think/We Think** handouts. Frame this activity by reminding participants that the only way to get students used to having conversations is to actually engage in conversations. How it looks in one room might look different than it does in another. Regardless of how student conversations look in a classroom, it is important that everyone is on the same page.

Display **slide 27**. In the "I Think" column, tell participants to reflect back on their learning and answer the question on the slide that applies to them. Remind participants that this is an independent task, and there will be a chance to share in a moment.

Presenter's Note: Summit Learning

If the participants' school does not use the Summit Learning platform, remove the reflection question that references Summit.

Display **slide 28.** Tell participants to, in the "We Think" column, compare what everyone has written and see what is the same across all individual lists.

Reinforce to participants that the "We Think" response reflects the idea that even though we all teach differently, we share common goals and intentions. It represents the shared team "contract" to which each person will hold one another accountable. It should not only reflect each person on the team but also be clear enough that someone joining the team can understand the expectations.

Leading Questions

If participants are struggling, pose the following questions:

- Which items can be combined?
- Which items are too generic or too vague?
- What are three ways you can be on the same page?
- How will you make this uniquely yours?

Optional Technology Integration

Before the session, set up a Padlet board for participants to use to collaborate during the We Think portion of this activity.

Before moving on to the final activity, turn to **slide 29**. Have participants consider the I Think/We Think instructional strategy and plot on their graphs where they believe it relates to talking and moving.

This is the last strategy being graphed, so as you click through slide 29, the "answers" will appear. Let participants know that it's okay if their answers are different; what is shown is just one way of interpreting the strategies.

Before you move on, ask participants the question at the bottom of the slide: *Based on your scatter plot, do student conversations happen in just one way?* After a few participants respond, remind teachers that adding student conversations into their teaching is about experimenting and trying different kinds of student conversations until you find the way that works for you and your students.

Display **slide 30** and direct your participants back to their note catchers. Provide them with a few minutes to complete it based on the activity, I Think/We Think.

Evaluate

Display **slide 31**. Participants will write their own SMART goal around increasing student conversations in their classrooms. They can either free-write their goal or use the **SMART Goal** handout to structure the writing. Remind participants that SMART goals should be:

- ***Specific:*** When and where will I increase student conversations in my class?
- ***Measurable***: How much and how often will student conversations occur? By what percentage will they increase?
- ***Attainable:*** What steps will I need to implement my SMART goal?
- ***Realistic:*** Who can help me with this goal? How will I know I have achieved an increase?
- ***Timely:*** When will this begin?

Let participants know that it's not just about writing a goal. They have to hold themselves accountable, and sometimes that can be hard! Have them find someone who is in their professional learning community to be their "accountability buddy."

Presenter's Note: Full-Circle Humor Opportunity

If you would like, mention that another *South Park* episode coined the term "accountabilibuddy." There's no need to provide further context besides reconnecting to the video clip at the beginning of the session.

Research Rationale

One of the core pillars of authenticity is disciplined inquiry and, specifically, substantive conversations (Newmann, Secada, & Wehlage, 1995). In the classroom, a substantive conversation is an exchange of knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions between students or between students and the teacher. In a truly socially constructivist learning experience, students have access to other people's perspectives and the chance to share their own thoughts (Dewey, 1958). Through this dialogue, students gain deeper, more holistic, and more engaged knowledge of the topic and make clearer meaning of what they are learning (Bahr & Bahr, 2017). Substantive conversations do not happen on the fringes of classrooms in passing but in the heart and center of instruction. For students to engage in meaningful substantive conversations, structured time and space must be afforded in the classroom. Such time and space are not provided to most students (Gibbs, 2006). Thus, teachers need help forming and articulating tasks that are properly structured to help them feel comfortable with implementing structures that afford students the chance to exchange thoughts and ideas.

Resources

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