



Supporting Comprehension in Secondary Classrooms Session 7:

Let's Talk About It:

Increasing Academic Discourse in Classrooms

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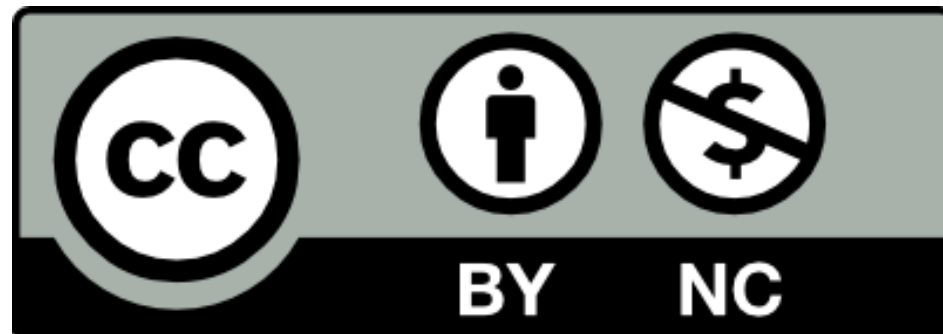


Acknowledgments

The content for this training day was developed based on the work of:

- Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings, by Jeff Zwiers & Marie Crawford
- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide: Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices
- Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Education Leadership Network Literacy Task Force (2019): Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy: grades 6 to 12

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Purpose

This session will provide an overview of instructional strategies that support the implementation of academic discourse in secondary classrooms

Agenda

1.0 The Benefits of Academic Discourse

2.0 Instructional Recommendations

3.0 Next Steps and Wrap Up

Before We Begin

- On a piece of paper or a digital document, take a moment to brainstorm your thoughts on:
 - The benefits and drawbacks of breakout room discussions in virtual trainings



1.0 The Benefits of Academic Discourse

Classroom Discussions are Necessary

“Classroom discussions are important because they develop both academic and non-academic skills in students. Communicating is essential to living in the current society and developing a healthy democracy. Being able to share, justify, defend, listen, and understand diverse perspectives and ideas is one of the most important competencies that human beings use in our current world. Hence, students need to learn these skills to be successful in their adult life.”

~The University of British Columbia, Scarfe Sandbox

Benefits of Academic Discourse

- Students love to talk!
- Providing opportunities to engage in academic conversations allows students to:
 - Build vocabulary
 - Oral language and communication skills
 - Develop critical thinking skills
 - Build relationships
 - Co-construct understandings
 - Develop voice, confidence, and a sense of empowerment

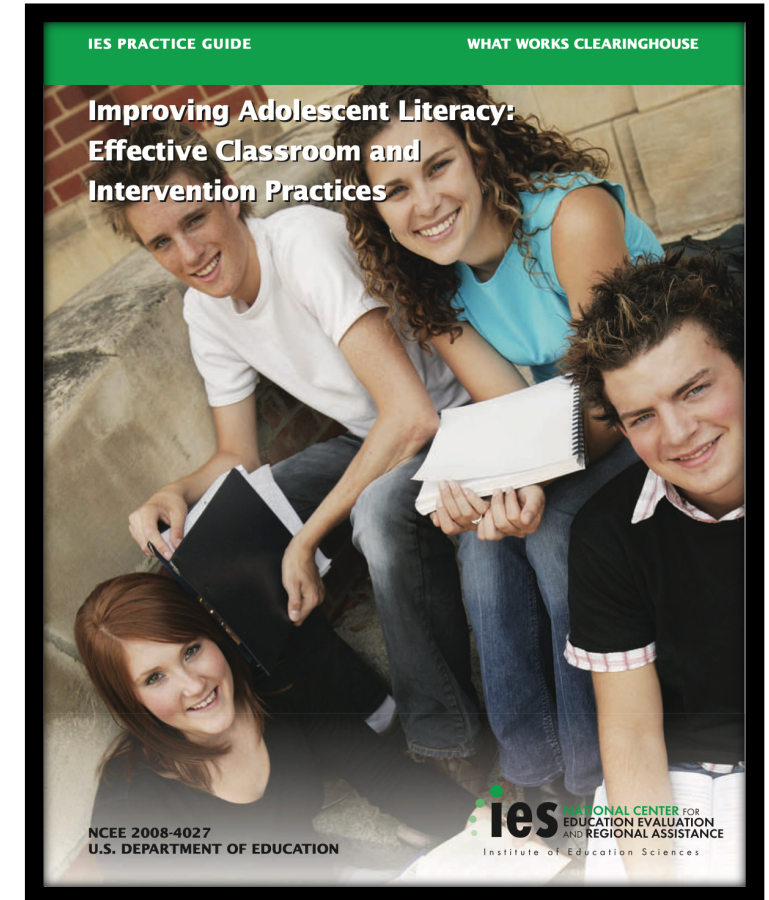


Activity 1.1: Personal Reflection

- Think about your instructional practices. On average, how often are your students engaging in short discussion opportunities? Extended discussion opportunities?
- What's going well? What struggles do you experience?

Research Base: IES Practice Guide Recommendation Three

- Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation
 - Carefully prepare for the discussion
 - Ask follow-up questions that help provide continuity and extend the discussion
 - Provide a task, or a discussion format, that students can follow when they discuss texts in small groups
 - Develop and practice the use of a specific “discussion protocol”



2.0 Instructional Recommendations

I. Teacher Preparation

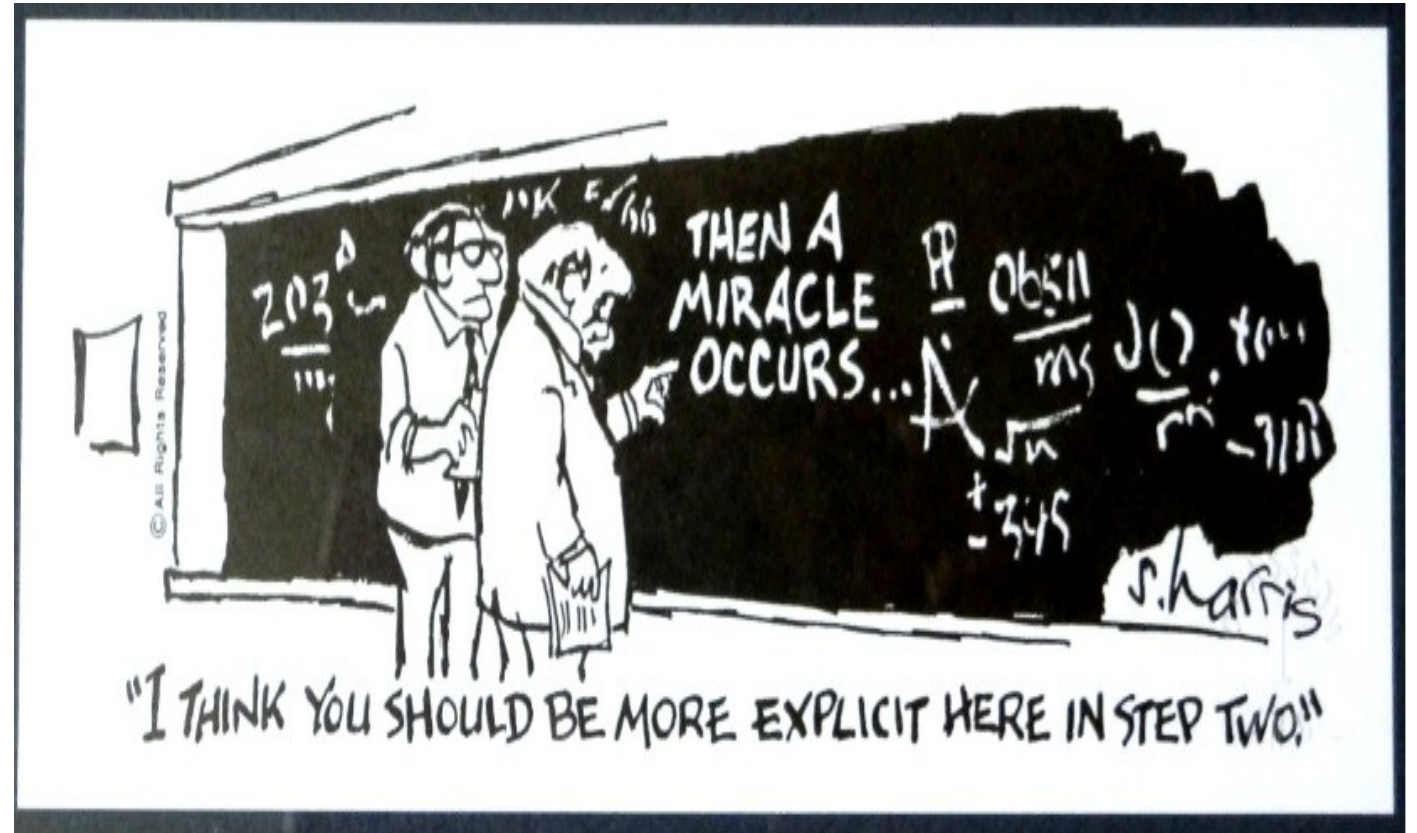


Activity 2.1: Rapid Response

- Please unmute and share your thoughts on the following question:
 - In your opinion, how important is it for a teacher to prepare for academic discussions in classrooms?

Intentional Preparation is Critical

- Teacher Preparation:
 - Task Preparation
 - Student Preparation
- Intentional Reflection



Initial Considerations: The Classroom Environment

- Assess the existing classroom culture
 - Assess the physical classroom environment and routines:
 - When needed, does your class have a routine to transition seating into position for a class discussion?
- Consider the lesson/topic being discussed
 - Determine if the existing classroom environment supports the type of conversation you envision
 - Would a change of scenery enhance the class discussion?

Classroom Environment and Culture

- What are your current classroom expectations? Do they include norms for conversations?
 - The way we speak
 - The way we listen
- Is there a need to begin with small conversations to build a culture of edifying conversation and sharing?
- Would it benefit the class to provide examples and non-examples of academic conversations?
 - Video analysis
 - Role play

Starting Small? Consider the Elaborated Think, Pair, Share

- In a typical Think, Pair, Share (TPS), one learner shares an idea, and the other learner shares an idea, and then they are usually finished talking
- Improve the quality of the TPS by requiring learners to ask each other at least one clarifying question and one supporting question during the pair share
 - Clarifying question stems: Can you explain why...? Can you say that again?
 - Supporting question stems: Can you give an example? How do you know...?

Teacher Preparation, continued

A. Preparing and Facilitating Group Discussions

Preparing for Academic Discussions: Teacher Tasks

- Discussion enabling tasks
- Discussion leading
- Maintaining focus on the instructional point



Activity 2.2: Resource Review

- Review the “Decomposition of leading a group discussion” portion of the “Leading a Group Discussion” handout
- As you review the tasks identified in the table, share with the group any items that are sometimes overlooked, but important when seeking to enhance class conversations

Preparing for the Discussion: Additional Considerations

- Consider the placement of the discussion: the beginning of a new topic? While students interact with new information? After students have been exposed to the content?
- Consider the opening question: Will it ignite conversation by being clear? Accessible to the entire audience? Interesting/intriguing?
- Analyze your facilitation skills: Am I providing adequate wait time? Encouraging all voices to engage? Attentive to any emotional responses?
- Consider the conversational format: Pairs? Triads? Fishbowl? Etc



Assignment 2.1: Conversational Format Ideas

- Review the suggestions provided on the following websites for examples of classroom discussion structures:
 - The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies
 - Examples include: Socratic seminar, Hot seat, Conver-stations
 - 11 Civil Discourse Strategies to Try in Your Classroom
 - Examples include: Opinion lineup, Four corners, Fishbowl
- As you review them, consider which would be ideal to incorporate in your classroom in the future
 - Keep in mind that students will need repeated practice with the structures to gain fluency in order to increase their focus on the actual conversation

Additional Teacher Preparation Considerations

B. Preparing for Potential Disengagement

Student Reluctance

- Even with engaging topics, some students are less motivated to participate in classroom discussions
- Further investigation, consideration and support may be necessary

What Might Be the Issue?

- Students may be reluctant for a number of reasons. Providing students with an opportunity to share their “why” can be valuable
 - Prefer learning independently?
 - Afraid to fail?
 - Quiet disposition?
 - Cultural considerations?
 - Overall phobia?
 - Learning impairment?

Supporting Reluctant Students

- Provide reluctant students with a reflective survey to gather information
 - Meet with them individually to discuss what was shared
 - Co-construct an action plan
- Consider multiple means of participation (discussion boards, collaborative documents, etc)
- Additional supports for shy students:
 - Positive nonverbal cues, including proximity
 - Provide students with time to write down their responses first, then share
 - Share some discussion questions in advance so students can prepare

Instructional Recommendations, continued

II. Student Preparation

The Way Students Engage Matters



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Strengthening Conversation Skills

- Elaboration and clarification
- Supporting Ideas with Examples
- Building On and/or Challenging a Partner's Idea
- Synthesizing Conversation Points
- Paraphrasing
- Don't forget: body language!

~Zwiers, 2011



Activity 2.3: Check and Connect

- Review the conversation skills again:
 - Elaboration and clarification
 - Supporting Ideas with Examples
 - Building On and/or Challenging a Partner's Idea
 - Synthesizing Conversation Points
 - Paraphrasing
 - Body language
- Which, if any, might your students need additional support with to enhance their academic discourse experiences?

Benefits of Conversation Skills

- Heightens students' awareness and use of skills that are not automatic
- Each skill supports two areas: listening for and the use of the skill
- The skills aid in supporting students' ability to learn content in deeper ways:
 - Exploring alternative perspectives
 - Negotiating thoughts
 - Co-constructing meaning

Skill One: Elaboration and Clarification

- Students provide specific details about a topic to present their thoughts with greater clarity. This can happen through the use of:
 - **Analogies:** illustrations involving an area different from the conversation's topic
 - Example analogy: Student discussions in a classroom are like a **potluck dinner**: everyone brings a different dish (ideas), and the collective meal is far more varied, nutritious, and interesting than if one person prepared everything
 - **Examples:** concrete instances or members of a category
 - The disruptions included **unexpected knocks on the door** and **unwanted phone calls**

Skill Two: Support Ideas with Examples

- Students strengthen their conversations by using examples as evidence to support their claims
- Types of examples include:
 - Examples from primary text (i.e., assigned readings)
 - Examples from other texts
 - Examples from the world
 - Examples from one's life

Skill Three: Build on and/or Challenge an Idea

- Connecting thoughts and ideas during conversations provides opportunities to strengthen, refine, or reconstruct understanding. Examples include:
 - Connect Ideas: linking a conversation point to a previous idea, text, or other conversation
 - Example conversation stem: To build on _____'s point, I would add...
 - Challenge an Idea: Providing students with supports to maintain tact and respect as differing views are discussed
 - Example conversation stem: I hear what _____ is saying, but I think that...

Skill Four: Paraphrasing

- Students must build proficiency in keeping track of what they are hearing in order to explain what they heard in their own words
 - Aids in clarifying understanding for the listener
 - So, what I hear you saying is... Is that accurate?
 - Helps to shape and refine the speaker's points
 - Allows participants to chunk key points of information

Skill Five: Synthesize Conversation Points

- As conversations take place, students must collect and connect points. This practice allows students to solidify and retain information

Activities to Support the Conversation Skills:

- Explicitly teach the skills
 - Consider examples and non-examples in various formats
- No/low-stakes practice opportunities with opportunities for feedback
 - Introduce conversation skills sentence stems
- Students practice identifying and analyzing examples and non-examples
 - Locate examples in text: analyze an author's use of the skill

Supporting the Skill of Paraphrasing

- Teach and model it with concrete examples
- The Paraphrase cards activity:
 - Students work in pairs
 - Student One makes (or reads) a statement
 - Student Two paraphrases the statement on their index card
 - Student Two shares their paraphrase
 - Students One and Two evaluate the paraphrase: Is it shorter than the original statement?
 - Reverse roles

Supporting the Skill of Synthesis

- Establish discussion expectations to support synthesis:
 - Are students allowed to take notes of what others are saying during academic discussions?
- Provide examples of synthesizing conversation points through different modalities: text examples, multimedia examples, etc



Activity 2.4: Resource Review

- Review the following resource for example sentence starters students can use when engaging in classroom discussions:
 - Academic Conversation Placemat



Activity 2.5: Let's Practice!

- Review the sentence stems provided in the Academic Conversation Placemat
- Review your initial thoughts from the opening question about breakout rooms
- Let's have four courageous volunteers engage in a brief conversation on this topic:
 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
“Breakout rooms are meant to foster connection, but more often than not, they do the opposite.” ~Dr. Wally T. Luckeydoo

Additional Instructional Recommendations

III. Intentional Reflection

How Did It Go?

- Intentional reflection on the discussion experience is valuable for teachers and students
 - Teacher reflection: Provides an opportunity to refine the discussion experience
 - Student reflection: An honest analysis of their preparation and interaction throughout the discussion
- Formal and informal reflection and feedback are beneficial

3.0 Next Steps and Wrap Up



Activity 3.1: Next Steps

- Based on personal reflection, determine what area you would like to strengthen as you move forward with this information:
 - Teacher preparation support
 - Student preparation resources
 - Reflection resources
- As you reflect on the areas covered today, what do you feel affirmed by?
- What will work on strengthening in the future?

An Additional Resource

- “How to Set the Stage for Challenging Discussions”
 - A brief video that provides insight on navigating discussions on controversial topics
 - The resource is found on the Edutopia.org website

Closing Thoughts

- Academic discourse is a high-impact instructional practice; however, intentional preparation is necessary
- Instructional scaffolds, such as the conversation stems, allow students to focus more of their attention on listening and providing the type of response academic discourse requires
- The eventual goal is for students to engage in academic discourse with minimal support from the teacher

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