

Prioritizing student voices and ideas.

Engaging in regular academic discourse is essential for students to synthesize texts and content, spark their curiosity, develop original ideas, and find their own voice.

Key Reading

Excerpt 1: *Academic Conversations, Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings*, by Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford, pg. 15

“Critical thinking skills allow us to understand and overcome the many challenges and problems that we face. We want students to learn new thinking skills and develop existing ones to serve them in more challenging situations. As for those many facts that need to be learned, it is thinking about them and communicating them that helps them to be learned in lasting ways.

Oral interaction is one of the main avenues for developing critical thinking skills. These are the skills that tend to be used by experts in every discipline to build, shape, and challenge new and valued ideas. ...

Conversations allow students to closely examine, scrutinize, criticize, validate, and share the ideas being discussed. Such skills are vital in a democratic society. They allow students to own their ideas. If students are taught only to be consumers of information whose sole purpose in school is to raise their test scores, then they are less likely to be successful in high-level courses and jobs in the future.

Academic conversations develop students’ intellectual agility. They learn to think in real time, to think on their feet. In conversation, students must be able to quickly process and respond to unanticipated comments, some of which might be very strong counterarguments. In conversations, students must continually compare their ideas to the ideas of others. And when students say their ideas out loud, they are open for critique and for development. This real-time cognitive agility is vital for future success.”

Excerpt 2: *Academic Conversations, Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings*, by Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford, pg. 21

“A cultural lens encourages us all to place a much higher priority on understanding how students think, learn, and communicate in order to develop academic skills and content. It forces us to think about the whole person and about how to strategically teach for students’ long-term academic, social, and emotional gains. A key cultural issue that arises is the variety of conversations that can and should happen. Each culture, community, and home might use conversations in different ways. One person’s idea of a conversation,

academic or otherwise, might differ significantly from that of another person. Diverse students might hear a wide range of academic conversations in their homes that take different paths and use different moves than what are expected at school. As Shirley Brice Heath, in her seminal study of language learning in homes and schools of differing communities, found, “There is a deep continuity between patterns of socialization and language learning in the home culture and what goes on at school.”

Related Teacher Tools

- [Academic Discourse](#)

Sources

The following research was referenced in the development of Fishtank ELA writing materials:

Crawford, Marie; Zwiers, Jeff (2011). *Academic Conversations, Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings*. Portsmouth, NH: Stenhouse Publishers.

Hammond, Z. (2014). *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Prompting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Corwin.

Lemov, Doug (2016). *Reading Reconsidered: a practical guide to rigorous literacy instruction*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Zwiers, J., O'Hara, S., & Pritchard, R. (2014). *Common Core Standards in Diverse Classrooms: Essential Practices for Developing Academic Language and Disciplinary Literacy*. Stenhouse.